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Critics'

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Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
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NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
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NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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Cast Index

Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in New York shows appearing during the year 1941. The number opposite the name indicates the page on which each is found in CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS. We regret that we can not include the various cast changes but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

"In Time to Come"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 29, 1941

Woodrow Wilson

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

ALTHOUGH they are dealing with a topic of tremendous import, Howard Koch and John Huston, the authors of "In Time to Come," write quietly, soberly, almost objectively. That is one of the virtues of their play. They are giving us, in factual, chronicle terms, devoid of excessive emotion, a biographical drama of Woodrow Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles, and the whole planting of the seeds of destruction, which made the treaty the start of a doomed armistice, rather than a peace, is implied in their narrative. Because in dealing with such a subject they have eschewed dramatic pyrotechnics of any sort, they are vastly convincing in what they are saying, and "In Time to Come" emerges as a dignified, arresting and remarkably convincing historical document. Not the least of its excellences is the performance of Richard Gaines in the all-important leading part.

* * *

"In Time to Come" begins with a brief prologue, showing Wilson reading to Congress his request for a declaration of war upon Germany. Then it hastily moves to the President's study in the White House, as he decides to go to France at the head of the American peace delegation. You see him aboard the George Washington, having trouble with reporters and in deep worry about the British objection to one of his fourteen points; in France as he struggles with the cynical Clemenceau, the shrewd Lloyd George and the impassioned Sonino to protect some of his idealist hopes for the future of the world, and then, back in the United States, as with cold and baffled bitterness he sees the overthrow of all his dreams. It is all told in straightforward, reportorial narrative style, and, because there is so believably and ominously implicit in it all the doom that threatened mankind and might have been escaped before it was too late, the effect is inescapably dramatic and impressive.

* * *

While it is clear that the sympathies of the authors are on the side of Woodrow Wilson and what he was striving to do, they are strikingly impartial in their attitude. They clearly dislike the reckless cynicism of Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Sonino, but they are entirely fair to Senator Lodge, permitting him a logical and persuasive statement of his views. And there is no hero-worshiping of Wilson. They see his idealism and his dogged courage, but they also see him as stubborn, self-willed dogmatic, impatient of all opposition, not too loyal to his friends and given to blind disregard of the practicalities of facing a situation. In fact, it is Colonel House, rather than Woodrow Wilson, who emerges as the most sympathetic character of the play. Since they grant that their central figure was by no means a warmly symphatic figure they concentrate on the quality of his ideas, rather than of his personality, and the appeal of "In Time to Come" becomes a strictly intellectual one.

* * *

In the tremendously difficult leading role, a part all the harder to play because it is without the deeper richness of a racy personality, Mr. Gaines gets off to a rather bad start, but it is not long before he has his characterization in hand, and it is then a fine and convincing one. Although Otto Preminger has staged the play with but limited effectiveness, having particular trouble with the wigs of his statesmen and the offstage sounds, the lesser characters are well and believably managed. Russell Collins, a good actor, is excellent as the perhaps slightly sentimentalized Col. House, and there is credible work by Miss Nedda Harrigan as Mrs. Wilson, William Harrigan as Tumulty, Alexander Clark as Dr. Grayson, John M. Kline as Henry White, Arnold Korff as a French dignitary, by House Jameson as Senator Lodge and by Rene Roberti, Guy Sorel and Harold Young as Sonino, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, respectively. "In Time to Come" is a striking chronicle play with an implied lesson.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK POST
December 29, 1941

"In Time to Come"

By WILELLA WALDORF

ONLY a short time ago the play produced last night at the Mansfield Theatre was known simply as "Woodrow Wilson." The new title, "In Time to Come," is designed to call attention to the fact that at the end of this war the world will again be faced with the business of creating a lasting peace, and to remind us of President Wilson's disheartening struggle to achieve it in 1918-19.

Any play full of historical characters familiar to every schoolboy is apt to take on a stiff picture-gallery quality in the theatre, with actors uncomfortably made up to resemble famous personages mouthing pretentious statements culled from public documents by earnest research workers disguised as playwrights.

A noble effort has obviously been made to overcome this handicap at the Mansfield, with the result that a number of the scenes in "In Time to Come" present Wilson's journey to Paris and his campaign to establish the League of Nations in unpretentious, human fashion, with humor and understanding of the insurmountable difficulties involved in such a program. The War President's passionate devotion to his ideal; his conviction that the people, not the politicians, should decide what course to pursue; his compromises at the peace conference to establish the League, and the eventual repudiation of his work by the isolationists in his own country make very stimulating dramatic material now that we find ourselves involved in another war to make the world safe for Democracy.

An Enduring Peace

When this war is ended, how is the world to make certain that it will never happen again? Wilson's struggle against overwhelming odds both in Europe and in Washington throw plenty of illumination on the international problems involved. Peace that is merely an interval between wars is one thing. Peace that will endure is another.

Otto L. Preminger's production of the play by the Messrs. Koch and Huston would have benefited greatly by a preliminary engagement out-of-town, but what it has to say is of such profound interest just now that carping over defects that are sure to be adjusted in subsequent performances seems rather foolish at this juncture. The loud-speaker sounds are sometimes too loud, making it difficult to hear the actors, particularly the playing of "Rule Britannia." Toning this down ought to be a simple matter. The entire production will be much smoother when the company has played together a little longer.

Some Good Performances

The acting, on the whole, was good. Richard Gaines, in the exceedingly difficult role of the President, grew steadily surer of himself after he had conquered first-night nervousness, and was enunciating the stirring Wilsonian doctrines with considerable force by the time he had boarded ship for the Peace Conference, against the advice of Colonel House. In appearance, too, he managed to suggest the College Professor who became President of the United States.

Russell Collins as House gave one of the most consistently effective performances of the evening, with Nedda Harrigan making a charming figure as Mrs. Edith Bolling Wilson, and William Harrigan a forthright Joseph Tumulty. Senator Lodge, Justice Brandeis, Admiral Cary Grayson, Henry White, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Sonino, Pichon and Orlando were all in capable hands.

When Mr. Preminger has pulled his production together a bit, "In Time to Come" should provide an uncommonly provocative evening in the theatre.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK SUN
December 29, 1941

'In Time to Come,' at the Mansfield

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

HONEST biographical plays are apt to take their tone from their subjects and Woodrow Wilson, although he conceived one of the great dramatic ideas of our time, was a man with little flair for drama. "In Time to Come," which opened last evening at the Mansfield, is a biographical study of Wilson, and its character is like his—high minded, intelligent, idealistic and emotionally rather colorless. It commands respect without enlisting partisanship.

Howard Koch and John Huston, the authors, have taken the tragic Wilson story from near the beginning of his crusade for a world enduringly at peace. They find him in Washington in September, 1918, when his dream of the League of Nations was a new dream. They follow him to Paris, to conferences with shrewder, more experienced men and down to defeat and to within a few months of his death. They show him with House and turning from House, with Tumulty and finally dismissing Tumulty; arguing with Lodge and beaten by Lodge. They try to probe into his subtle, austerely idealistic mind and go, I am afraid, not far beneath the surface.

They make an interesting chronicle, but miss drama. Perhaps it was inevitable that drama should escape them; it is possibly significant that even in a play dedicated to Wilson lesser men take on greater variety and color. Clemenceau, a surly, violent old man, pretending emotions to suit his purpose, is more alive on the stage than Wilson. House is more alive, and Lodge and even Tumulty. In them the authors found human vitality and the glow of merely human motives. In "In Time to Come," as in the years of the other war, Wilson himself is austere and detached, and it is hard to make such men into the heroes of drama. And concentration on Wilson himself has led to oversimplification of the events of which he was a part, so that even the drama of great happenings fritters away.

Richard Gaines, especially in the later scenes, is an effective Wilson and does suggest, without describing, the human side of the great idealist. There are excellent performances, also, by Russell Collins as House, William Harrigan as Tumulty and Guy Sorel as Clemenceau. Several, although by no means all, of the small parts are well played. Badly managed loud speakers sometimes drown out the dialogue, but probably nothing of great moment is thus lost.

"In Time to Come"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES
December 29, 1941

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"In Time to Come"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NO DOUBT the gravity of this hour contributes something to a playgoer's appreciation of Howard Koch's and John Huston's "In Time to Come," which was acted at the Mansfield last evening. But even in the ambiguous period that preceded our going to war, this drama about Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations would have been profoundly sobering and impressive.

For Mr. Koch and Mr. Huston, authors of "Sergeant York," have written the record of the greatest of the world's lost causes without rhetoric or recrimination. There, by the grace of God, went a chance to prevent the scourge of warfare that is now beating the aching back of the world. Although Woodrow Wilson is their hero, they have not averted their eyes from his defects of personality, his sharp temper and high-handed use of men. They have unfolded a great tragedy of ideals and the hero who stood for them, and they have not cheapened it. When Woodrow Wilson goes down in the last scene, you know that the ancient blackness is settling down over the world again.

Dramas populated by public men of current or recent memory are usually painful to watch in the theatre. Impersonation is likely to be the grotesque side of acting. But most of the acting in "In Time to Come" is of a high order. And Richard Gaines, who acts Woodrow Wilson, gives a remarkable performance. His make-up is plausible enough, although the resemblance is not striking. But he admirably conveys the intellectual alertness and the moral tenacity of a great leader. Nor does he evade the cold personal pride of a man who cannot deal with those who are not with him in everything. Mr. Gaines's portrait is full of interior passion. Reticent externally, it is flaming inside. Eventually it burns out a human soul and leaves the pitiable derelict of an old man stumping around in the White House. For the authors of "In Time to Come" know that the tragedy of the League of Nations is the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson, and Mr. Gaines is able to convey their central idea.

* * *

The play chronicles the League of Nations from the moment in September, 1918, when Wilson is thinking of attending the prospective peace conference in person, to March 4, 1921, when, a broken chief, he is preparing to leave the White House with the ashes of his great idea. It gives a glimpse of him on the steamship George Washington when he has just learned by wireless that his fourteen points are being reduced to thirteen. It shows him surrounded with enemies in a conference room in Paris where cynicism and the greed of his allies are whittling down his expectations of a peace that will endure. In a stormy, bitter-tongued interview with Lodge it moves a little nearer to tragedy, and the last scene completes his undoing.

* * *

Otto Preminger has directed a neat and illuminating performance. As Colonel House, Russell Collins, in an obvious wig, startles this column's preconceptions of that shadowy figure. Was he so facile and chipper? But all the other parts are well played despite some very gauche wigs. Guy Sorel's portrait of Clemenceau is extraordinarily good—tired, scornful and vindictive. There is an uncommonly good sketch of Judge Brandeis by Bernard Randall, John M. Kline's Henry White is skillfully drawn, and House Jameson's Senator Lodge is short on resemblance but long on vitality and hatred. As Mrs. Wilson, Nedda Harrigan is alive and affectionate. And William Harrigan is at his best in the part of the loyal Tumulty.

In designing the four sets, Harry Horner has had some difficulty with their mobility. The waits between scenes are obviously too long. But the sets are excellent in themselves and they help in the projection of an honest high-minded drama about a great subject. Mr. Koch and Mr. Huston have not overwritten it. They have let the facts speak for themselves. In our hearts we know what they mean. And now that we are drawn once more into a world calamity we know that peace must not be slain again.

'IN TIME TO COME'

A play in seven scenes by Howard Koch and John Huston; settings by Harry Horner; costumes by John Koenig; directed by Otto L. Preminger and presented by Mr. Preminger at the Mansfield Theater on December 28, 1941. The cast:

Woodrow Wilson	Richard Gaines
Edith Bolling Wilson	Nedda Harrigan
Captain Stanley	Randolph Preston
Tumulty	William Harrigan
Colonel House	Russell Collins
Judge Brandeis	Bernard Randall
Dillan	James Gregory
Terry	Harold J. Kennedy
Smith	Philip Coolidge
Price	Edgar Mason
Gordon	Robert Gray
Dr. Cary Grayson	Alexander Clark
Henry White	John M. Kline
Professor Seymour	Maurice Burke
Signor Orlando	Vincenso Rocco
Signor Martino	Joseph Quaranto
Monsieur Pichon	Arnold Korff
Sonino	Rene Roberti
Clemenceau	Guy Sorel
Lloyd George	Harold Young
Senator Lodge	House Jameson

Reprinted from
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 29, 1941

"In Time to Come" in Memory of Woodrow Wilson, Idealist

"In Time to Come," drama by Howard Koch and John Huston. Produced by Otto L. Preminger at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Dec. 28, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

"IN TIME TO COME" is the new play at the Mansfield. It is a drama that seeks to give the world an honest picture of Woodrow Wilson, idealist, and his fight for a League of Nations that would, in his vision, have saved the world from this second plunge into war.

Howard Koch and John Huston are the authors, and Richard Gaines is the chief protagonist in the role of Wilson. These are all three fine performances, it seems to me.

The authors, being partisan, could easily have over exposed their portrait of the first world war President. And Mr. Gaines being slack in his study or prejudiced in his view, could have exaggerated his characterization in an effort to create another martyred hero. Both authors and actors have been scrupulously careful to be fair.

This retelling of President Wilson's last crusade begins with his appearance before Congress to ask a declaration of war against Germany in 1917 and his statement of the purposes of that war to end war.

It ends with his crushing defeat at the hands of a people who admired the man but doubted the practicality of his crusade after his pathetic cross-country appeal for League support.

The picture is always in focus as that of a sincere but stubborn professor in politics; one who became so embittered and unreasoning in his last illness that he deliberately cast off his closest friends, the gentle and far-seeing Col. House, the vigorously loyal Tumulty.

So completely had he become the pawn of his own passionate convictions that even a sight of those who reminded him of failure was more than his sensitive soul could bear.

There is a scene covering the President's precedent-shattering decision to leave the country and attend the Versailles conference in person. His historic meeting with the equally stubborn and less idealistic Clemenceau, Sonino and Lloyd George is revealed in realistic and dramatic detail. Finally his break with the political villain of the piece, the reactionary leader of the Republican opposition, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, is dramatically re-enacted.

What those who did not live through the stirring days of President Wilson's last fight and pathetic collapse will think of "In Time To Come" I have no way of telling.

To them it may seem occasionally slow paced and wordy. But to those who did have that experience it should prove an always interesting and frequently stirring bit of dramatic history.

Good Performances

Mr. Gaines, as said, gives an outstanding performance in the Wilson role. The man's austerity, his scholarly poise and confidence, the ardor and intensity of his determination not to let those people down who had believed in the war to end war, the war to save Democracy, are impressively reproduced.

And there are other satisfying characterizations—notably Russell Collins' amiable Col. House, Rene Roberti's fiery Sonino, Guy Sorel's weasened, snapping-turtle Clemenceau, House Jameson's politically vindictive Senator Lodge, Arnold Korff's colorful bit as Pichon, Harold Young's tolerant and slyly appeasing Lloyd George.

Nedda Harrigan plays a tender and devoted Edith Bolling Wilson, and William Harrigan does as much with Tumulty as the authors permit him to do. It is he who eloquently reads Col. House's last letter from which the title is taken—the letter prophesying the time to come when men would realize the truth of his President's vision.

The settings are by Harry Horner, and nicely servicable, and the direction by Producer Otto Preminger. Last night's audience was plainly appreciative of both play and performance.

"In Time to Come"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
December 29, 1941

"In Time to Come"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

A TRAGEDY, Greek in its ingredients and of a magnitude that the world has only come to realize of these recent anguishing years, lies in the story of Woodrow Wilson's fight for the League, his ultimate defeat and the elements within himself which contributed to the failure of his noble ideal. This story of a man dedicated to a dream and cruelly broken, like the dream itself, by the mean realities of politics, both national and international, has been one which, since its tragic conclusion and particularly since its still more tragic aftermath, has been bound to win the attention of dramatists.

Emile Ludwig endeavored to deal with it some years back in a play called Versailles which never reached Broadway. Now, in Howard Koch's and John Huston's In Time to Come, which arrived at the Mansfield last evening, it has been much more absorbingly stated. This saga will be better dramatized in the future. The "hero stuff" is in its materials—the "hero stuff," undone from within as well as from without; this, and the world's misfortunes. But for the moment let it be gratefully confessed that, though In Time to Come is not by any means a major drama, it is a steadily interesting one.

* * *

The dangers of a play based upon history so close at hand are many. The challenges of personal memories have to be silenced before what is offered as fact ceases to seem a charade. There are few Equity members who can answer to the names of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Orlando, Dr. Grayson, Tumulty, Mr. Justice Brandies, Senator Lodge, Colonel House, the second Mrs. Wilson or Mr. Wilson without mobilizing our disbelief. The actual has a stubborn way of refusing to give way to the fictional in such cases. We are surprisingly possessive about such history as has been a part of our lives, and eager when make-believe is substituted for the truth as we remember it, to counter with a "That wasn't so."

Yet soon after it gets under way, In Time to Come manages to spike most such objections. If it finds the wig-makers disconcertingly at fault at times, it succeeds amazingly in silencing those with personal or photographic memories. Mr. Koch and Mr. Huston have been wise enough to let the records speak pretty much for themselves. Just now, when the hopes of an abiding peace after this war are already very much our concern, the disillusioning record of Mr. Wilson's magnificent failure has things to say to us which no one can ignore or avoid being very much concerned with.

Thanks to Mr. Wilson and history, it is a compelling story that Mr. Koch and Mr. Huston have to tell. In advancing it, their dispassion is another proof of their wisdom. They do not glorify Mr. Wilson. They are shrewd enough to keep their hero human and to realize that his great glory was his dream. They state that ideal persuasively at the same time that they show Wilson's stubbornness, his inability to handle his enemies, his professional dogmatism, his glacial coldness, his unwillingness to be crossed and his lack—at once tragic and superb—of the politician's willingness to compromise and barter. A test of their fairness is that the one scene in which Senator Lodge appears is the best written of their episodes, and one wherein two irreconcilable men and viewpoints are allowed to confront one another with admirable impartiality.

From the eloquent words of his Declaration of War address, through scenes in the White House, on the George Washington, in Paris and at the White House when the President is seen after his illness, Mr. Koch and Mr. Horner follow the final epic years in Mr. Wilson's official career. If they add little to the story, they subtract little from it. That in itself is a considerable, if somewhat pedestrian, accomplishment. At least it makes for an evening during which one's attention is riveted on the stage.

* * *

As a director, Mr. Preminger needs to tone down his overloud sound effects and free some of his action. But the production, like the play, is full of interest. Richard Gaines gives a highly commendable performance as Mr. Wilson. He is dignified, properly cold at moments and credible throughout. It is only during his somewhat overpitched emotional moments that he threatens the illusion, although even then he does not destroy it. Guy Sorel is an excellent Clemenceau in spite of his wig; Harold Young is a visually persuasive Lloyd George, and John M. Kline a convincing Henry White. William Harrigan creates a Tumulty who is an endearing figure and Nedda Harrigan is most decidedly a helpful Mrs. Wilson. House Jameson is an effective Senator Lodge even if he does not resemble him. It is only the Colonel House of Russell Collins that proved bothersome to me.

All in all, the play is far more interesting than the majority of Broadway offerings, and most decidedly deserves to be seen.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 29, 1941

'In Time to Come'

Wilson's Career Theme of Play

By JOHN ANDERSON

TO STEP away from present headlines and into a theatre where Woodrow Wilson is warning Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando in the Quai d'Orsay of the horrible results of their tricky diplomacy is to measure the impact and special interest of the new play at the Mansfield. Since the authors, Howard Koch and John Huston, are optimists clinging to the Wilson ideal, they call their play "In Time To Come." A wiser and much, much sadder title is "It Might Have Been."

For the dramatic perfection of President Wilson's tragedy is that the origin of his failure was in his own character. The play follows his high hope for a lasting peace and his decision to negotiate the treaty himself. It shows his personal dislike for Senator Lodge, his brusque refusal to heed all warnings, and shows him haggling in Paris, swapping his ideals one at a time for the dream of a League of Nations, only to have that dream kicked out of the treaty by the men whose advice and counsel he had scorned.

Wrecked Dream

It was never a pretty picture, and it isn't now that we sit among the wreckage of, among other things, the Wilson dream, but it makes an absorbing and in two or three scenes genuinely exciting evening in the theatre. Though the authors admire Mr. Wilson's vision, they are honest in showing the less admirable part of his character—his petty vanity, his jealousy, his impetuous decision, his stubbornness and his arrogance. They show, too, the personal coldness which kept him aloof and which made him, helpless in the clinches, to reach the people for whom he intended his great scheme.

The events themselves cast a shadow that has deepened into the present, but in the play they are fiercely illuminated as in a landscape vivid with gunfire. And it is this string of events, neatly put together, that gives the play its tragical emphasis. As a play it is none too steady, and Mr. Preminger's production is extremely slipshod, especially in its use of sound effects and amplifiers which, in two instances, almost ruin the scenes. Some of the wigs are enough to frighten any actor out of his performance.

Probably some of the unevenness of the general performance is due to the episodic nature of the play and to the frigidity of the central character. Mr. Wilson was apparently pretty glacial in life, and his portrayal is chilly to the point of cold shouldering the other players. Richard Gaines suggests the President very accurately, though without force enough to galvahize the play.

Russell Collins is admirable in what must be a rather flattering portrait of Col. House, and William Harrigan as Tumulty and Nedda Harrigan as the second Mrs. Wilson are both excellent. There are very good smaller sketches by Alexander Clark, John M. Kline and Arnold Korff.

Harry Horner's settings seem frugally executed but effective, in spite of some gaping joints in a White House room, left, I suppose, by careless stage hands.

But most of these minor blemishes may be forgotten at a play that has the curious fascination of, for instance, an old edition of "The Living Newspaper" brought suddenly into the glare of today's headlines.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 29, 1941

Wilson's Wonderful One-Hoss Peace

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SOME bitter and ironic pages of history are turned in *In Time to Come*, where the guilty past speaks to the embattled present. Messrs. Koch and Huston have told the story of President Wilson's struggle to make a just and lasting peace after the first World War, of the swindle he was duped into accepting at Versailles, and finally of the opposition that destroyed him at home. Their title plainly indicates the moral that underlies their tale: the peace terms at the end of this war must not be like those of the last. This is a timely moment for such a message; though when the war is over, it will be an even timelier one.

The facts of history, however telling and pregnant, seldom produce inspired drama; and in any strict sense *In Time to Come* is no great shakes as a play. It is uneven, it reveals at times the starched quality which is the bane of its genre; it hobbles at the start and dawdles at the end. But judged simply as a chronicle, it has a good deal to recommend it. Most of it is interesting. Some of it is vigorous. Its two best scenes—where Wilson comes up against the *Realpolitik* of Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Sonino, and where, on his return to America, he confronts Senator Lodge—are tense, sharp, verbally electric. Perhaps best of all, it makes very clear the issues involved, even if it does not always dramatize them; and it paints a vivid picture of the idealistic, stubborn, stiff-necked, opinionative Wilson. And along with its higher moral, it draws a usefully cynical one: that a leader who spurns and recoils from "politicians" will never be able to cope with them.

Mr. Preminger's direction is not too helpful; it accentuates rather than lessens what is stiff and rhetorical in the play. Richard Gaines plays Wilson with surface effectiveness, though little inwardness. The rest of the cast is so-so, except for the live, crackling Clemenceau of a young Frenchman named Guy Sorel.

"Clash by Night"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK POST
December 29, 1941

"Clash by Night"

By WILELLA WALDORF

CLIFFORD ODETS' latest play, "Clash By Night," which opened at the Belasco Theatre last Saturday evening, is a sordid triangular tragedy laid in a flimsy bungalow on the shore at Staten Island. In recognition of the author's eminence as a playwright, Billy Rose, who produced this new work, has called in an able stage director, enlisted expert technicians and lavished upon Mr. Odets' script an impressive cast headed by Tallulah Bankhead. Their combined efforts, however, are unable to make "Clash By Night" seem anything more than a curiously empty play that drags along through a series of seven turgid scenes, stirring up little dramatic excitement even at the end, when murder is committed in a movie theatre's projection room while a picture is being shown.

Mr. Odets' flair for writing dialogue that is in itself stirringly dramatic seems to have deserted him almost entirely in "Clash By Night." Much of the talk in the Staten Island home of the Wilenskis is common-place chatter that becomes tiresome after a while, interspersed with some typically pretentious Odetsian obscurities. When Odets is writing an "Awake and Sing!" his deep understanding of simple human beings ill supplied with the world's goods is translated to the audience in glowing dramatic terms. When he is turning out a "Clash By Night" his earnest effort to restate one of the oldest themes in theatrical history against a new background succeeds merely in being tiresome.

Miss Bankhead's Role

Even the presence of such a vital, electric actress as Tallulah Bankhead on the stage does remarkably little to bring the stagnant script to life. Miss Bankhead, as Mae Wilenski, the Staten Island housewife who falls in love with Earl Pfeiffer, her husband's best friend, has several effective scenes in which her pent-up spirits gush forth, but there were times when she, and the entire supporting company, seemed to be swimming uneasily in a sea of Odets verbiage, getting nowhere in particular and barely managing to keep afloat.

Miss Bankhead is an actress of great technical skill, with a personality that is in itself dramatic. When she is ill at ease in a part, as she sometimes seemed to be on Saturday evening, the entire performance naturally suffers. She never seemed to be particularly at home in the run-down Staten Island cottage, even though she was supposed to have lived there with Jerry Wilenski and his aged father for seven years, and was the mother of the seven-week-old baby sleeping in the next room.

Joseph Schildkraut as the movie projectionist who comes to occupy the spare room at the Wilenskis' is flashily convincing as "the other man" in the triangle, while Lee J. Cobb, the big, hulking, bewildered Polack husband, is pathetically distraught as the simple fellow whose whole world crashes about him when his wife and his friend fall in love and decide to walk out on him. Katherine Locke appears occasionally in a vaguely written neighbor's part, and there are good performances in support by Seth Arnold, Robert Ryan and John F. Hamilton, plus a brief drunken bit for Art Smith.

A Staten Island Hovel

Lee Strasberg, an old hand at Odets, has directed the production carefully, without being able to put much vitality into it, and although Boris Aronson's movie projection room, scene of the inevitable murder in the end, is realistically effective, his sets depicting the Wilenskis' Staten Island hovel struck us as too stark and slum-like.

After all, the Wilenskis, though far from rich, are hardly living in the Lower Depths. Jerry is an employed carpenter, they take in a roomer to help pay the rent, and Mae is referred to by her neighbor as a woman of sufficient house-wifely instincts to have insisted upon clearing out the major portion of the filth when she came to live in the place and pitched her husband's slovenly uncle out of his comfortable pig-sty so that she could get at it with disinfectant and a mop. Yet her kitchen, on the Belasco stage, has little of the suburban, lower middle-class atmosphere Mr. Odets suggests as the background of his characters.

'CLASH BY NIGHT'

A play in two acts and seven scenes by Clifford Odets; directed by Lee Strasberg; settings by Boris Aronson; presented at the Belasco Theater on December 27, 1941, by Billy Rose. The cast:

Jerry Wilenski	Lee J. Cobb
Joe W. Doyle	Robert Ryan
Mae Wilenski	Tallulah Bankhead
Peggy Coffey	Katherine Locke
Earl Pfeiffer	Joseph Schildkraut
Jerry's Father	John F. Hamilton
Vincent Kress	Seth Arnold
Mr. Potter	Ralph Chambers
Tom	Art Smith
A Waiter	William Nunn
A Man	Harold Grau
Abe Horowitz	Joseph Shattuck
An Usher	Stephan Eugene Cole

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December 29, 1941

'Clash by Night'

Tallulah Bankhead in Odets Role

By JOHN ANDERSON

BILLY ROSE has put aside his waterproof festivals and his dramatic buffaloes for the moment to undertake the more hazardous business of the legitimate theatre, and he emerged at the Belasco Saturday night as the producer of Clifford Odets' newest play, "Clash by Night," starring Tallulah Bankhead. It is a combination designed to make as much splash as the Aquacade, though it turned out, as far as this regretful report is concerned, merely all wet.

Mr. Rose has given a very fine production to one of Mr. Odets' worst plays, a rambling, episodic, lurid and rather pretentious drama of sex and murder on Staten Island which reveals gaudily the decline of the fine talent that gave us "Waiting for Lefty" and "Awake and Sing."

This impression will doubtless pain those who usually rush forward in the defense of any Odets work with the explanation that the critics simply do not understand. I am even willing to admit that Mr. Odets is sometimes a little vague about the inner meaning of his drama and often deserves the benefit of the doubt. But when the externals of his playmaking are as trashy as this, the point seems hardly worth arguing.

Staten Island Pair

For the purposes of his plot Mr. Odets sets up the gritty story of a Staten Island couple verging on middle age whose lives are wrecked by a lonely gentleman they take in as a roomer. Through this eternal, and seemingly interminable, triangle, the author tries to frame and express the underlying theme of his play, the same theme —if I am not mistaken—of "Night Music." It is the longing of every one for security, for love, for a home, for some relation to life that makes them feel wanted and necessary.

Jerry Wilenski is a big, soft-hearted, easy going Polish-American who loves his wife and child, and who is willing to take life as it comes, even on the instalment plan. His wife is a sharp realist, who says that money is 99.9 per cent of everything, and who longs for a man who will protect her against the world. When Earl Pfeiffer falls in love with her she runs off with him, and the last scene shows Earl getting his throat caught, as Mr. Lardner used to put it, in Jerry's fingers.

Mr. Odets' usually adroit craftsmanship fails him when he brings in another couple, a pair of young lovers afraid to face life. The two go along as a sort of trailer to the main story, and at the end, when Jerry has just killed Earl in the projection booth of a movie theatre, Mrs. Wilenski is standing outside telling the youngsters to go ahead and lead their own lives, with courage, etc.

It seems trite and obvious, so that the violent ending is merely the feeble explosion of a fizzling firecracker. To pretend that it has any social significance is a little like taking Mr. Cain's hardboiled "The Postman Always Rings Twice" for a defense of the U. S. mails.

Settings Good

Mr. Aronson's settings are finely atmospheric and swiftly changed (though I wish they didn't reflect baby spotlights in the window glass), and under Lee Strasberg's sensitive direction the cast turns in some excellent performances.

Miss Bankhead is sultry and fascinating as the lovelorn Staten Islander, and, while she seemed more Manhattan than Richmond this may be merely interborough jealousy. Lee J. Cobb gives one of the finest performances of this or any other season as the hulking, good-natured Jerry in a portrayal of compelling effectiveness.

Mr. Schildkraut, absent in Hollywood all these years, returns to present a sharply drawn and highly effective portrait of the lonely lover. There are also good performances in smaller assignments by Katherine Locke, Seth Arnold, Art Smith, Robert Ryan and John F. Hamilton. But the total effect is that Mr. Odets' play seems hardly worth their trouble.

Or yours.

"Clash by Night"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES
December 29, 1941

"Clash by Night"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "Clash By Night," which was splendidly acted at the Belasco on Saturday evening, Clifford Odets is writing individual scenes better than the play as a whole. Individual scenes are brilliant and vivid. When his drama opens casually on a battered porch in Staten Island and Mr. Odets starts creating character out of the common chaos of modern life, he is writing in top form with honesty, knowledge and vitality.

These bedraggled characters on the rim of life may be commonplace in fact. But you would never suspect from the freshness of Mr. Odets's writing or from the shining homeliness of their kitchen and the beach joint where they go to dance and drink beer. The talk is steeped in vernacular, without being self-conscious. The problems of love, friendship and dollars and cents are universal; the vague longings for some sort of fulfillments are admirable and true. Sometimes Mr. Odets is a mannered writer; sometimes he dotes on the sound of his own dialogue. But he writes the first half of "Clash By Night" like a mature man of the theatre. Put that much of it down not only as his best work, but as some of the best literary work any one has done in the modern drama.

* * *

After the first half of the evening, "Clash By Night" shrinks in size. Mr. Odets is writing the story of how a wife falls in love with a friend of her husband and decides to leave her husband and home. Since the characters are original people, the story is wonderfully engrossing while the situation is developing. But after it has come to a crisis, Mr. Odets has nothing original to contribute to it. For what does the second half of "Clash By Night" have to say except that a triangular situation is painful to every one concerned? The husband goes to pieces. The wife is torn to pity for him. The lover is sorry for the anguish he has caused, although he is genuinely glad to be in love and means to continue. But these obvious conclusions do not fulfill the high promise of the first half of the play, and they leave the last half maundering and wordy.

* * *

The whole thing is beautifully acted and produced under Lee Strasberg's direction. Boris Aronson has designed some of the finest sets of the season. Behind the grubbiness of the environment he is describing he has managed to capture a kind of affection and warmth for life that drifts through it. As the woman in the case, Tallulah Bankhead is giving a glowing performance of a forceful character who is shaken out of irritated indifference into surrender and decision. Like Mr. Odets, Miss Bankhead is mannered when she is at loose ends. Her mannerism consists in tossing around her nicely waved hair. But when she has a mood or an idea to catch hold of, she can bite into it like a tigress. She convinces you that the woman in the case is a highly complex and tempestuous person.

* * *

As the lover Joseph Schildkraut is also giving a superb performance—vibrant and lucid. In the less prepossessing part of the husband Lee J. Cobb, an excellent actor, portrays the stupid good-will and the sprawling misery of a man who is swept beyond his depth by things he cannot understand. Katherine Locke gives a capable performance of a neurotic, apprehensive girl who is frightened by the wildness of life she sees around her. As the young man who wants to marry her, Robert Ryan is manly and clear-headed; and Seth Arnold is highly amusing as the shuffling voice of doom.

If only Mr. Odets could finish "Clash By Night" with the incandescence of the first half of the evening! He has a genius for character and dialogue. His theme is commonplace.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 28, 1941

Domestic Tragedy Is Still Odets' Worry in His 'Clash by Night'

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

DO YOU remember the posters of a poverty-stricken, unhappy child in a recent wide charity drive used to illustrate the slogan: "Suppose Nobody Cared?"

That query kept ringing in my ears all the way from the Belasco Theatre to this desk last night. I had just seen Clifford Odets' newest domestic drama "Clash by Night," perfectly staged and acted.

In the matter of external perfections, here is a model for both dramatists and producers.

In the matter of individual performances, actors and actresses for miles around can go to the Belasco and take lessons from Tallulah Bankhead as a poor, drab, unhappy Polish girl; from Lee J. Cobb as her blundering, clioddish, unhappy husband and from Joseph Schildkraut as a fresh young egoist who moves in as their boarder on Staten Island and steals Tallulah away.

But what if nobody cares?

Tough on Billy

Then Billy Rose loses his investment as a producer of legitimate drama, and that would be regretable, because the legitimate drama very much needs producers of the Rose courage, faith and resources.

If nobody really cares what happens to these people in the play—to Mae Wilenski, and Jerry Wilenski and Earl Pfeiffer—they are going to be disappointed in Tallulah, Lee and Joseph, no matter how fine a job they are doing as actors.

Being disappointed they will not, I fear, be the bearers of glad box office tidings.

Maybe I'm wrong. Perhaps they will care. But I couldn't honestly advise them to pay their money to see "Clash by Night" unless (1) they greatly admire the Odets domestic tragedy formula, or (2) they definitely adore Tallulah Bankhead in one of her most desperately frustrated moods, or (3) they are interested in the skill of such exceptional character actors as Mr. Cobb and Mr. Schildkraut.

Familiar Pattern

"Clash by Night" is no more trite in subject and story than dozens of other domestic triangles, but to me it is handicapped in that it concerns unsympathetic, uninteresting subjects and is completely unrelieved in mood and tone.

With audience attention focussed on the performances rather than the adventures of the actors, illusion is quickly dissipated.

Last night's first audience was attentive and apparently pleased with what they got from Mr. Odets' newest work. He still has a fine feeling for character analysis, natural dialogue and dramatic situation.

In supporting roles Katherine Locke, Robert Ryan, John Hamilton, Seth Arnold, and Joseph Shattuck ably played up to their leaders.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 29, 1941

Odets, Where Is Thy Zing?

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BECAUSE Clifford Odets is among the scandalously few American playwrights in whom one can have any faith, it is distressing to find him writing so bad, so dull, and not least, so downright clumsy a play as *Clash By Night*. Mr. Odets has been disappointing often, has been too windy or too shrill or too pretentious, has lacked taste and discipline, has indulged himself, repeated himself, parodied himself. But never until now has he seemed to lack creative vigor, creative force; never, no matter how exasperating he might be, has he not seemed gifted. What really appalls one in *Clash By Night* is not so much its badness as its deadness.

This is the more unfortunate in that it bears evidence of being a genuinely serious play. The plot, to be sure, is old and badly bedraggled. The tale of the kindly lump of a husband, the bored, frustrated wife and the lodger who has a way with him, has been vulgarized a-plenty. All the same, if it handicapped Mr. Odets, it by no means hamstrung him. Perhaps he saw it as something to breathe upon anew, as something to take seriously and treat tragically, as something to recreate in a milieu of near-poverty, as something involving the confused and tortured soul of a dumb but betrayed human being, as something—in fine—that might lie as close in spirit to, shall we say, *Othello* as to *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Only the vaguest ghost of such intentions flutters through the play, however. Everything is wrong with it. It moves at the speed of an avalanche, but with none of the weight. The big pivoted scenes are too long in coming, blocked by sapless talk, by repetitious incident, by unnecessary characters. There is a dramatically pointless subplot. There are speeches full of the old rhetorical mush. There is even some incredibly bad stagecraft.

And when, finally, the play moves from climax toward catastrophe, with the husband groping wildly for some answer, some release, there is nothing to quicken it with even vulgar suspense, let alone pervade it with the feeling of tragic doom.

Here it is not even a question of the writing, inadequate though that is. Once again Mr. Odets flubs his timing: when vengeance comes, the audience is past caring about it. And worst of all, it comes hammily.

Miss Bankhead has her decidedly brilliant moments, but she fails to give the heroine a convincing outline, or fit her into a drab and proletarian background. Mr. Schildkraut plays the boarder with ease, though with nothing more. Katherine Locke does little to redeem a part that makes no sense to begin with. Much the best performance is Mr. Cobb's who, though he over-acts in proportion to the degree that Odets overwrites, brings force and understanding to the part of the bewildered husband.

"Clash by Night"

Reprinted from
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
December 29, 1941

Mr. Odets' Clash by Night

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AWAKE and Sing and Waiting for Lefty were genuine achievements. In them Clifford Odets' fine talent displayed itself most notably. They were plays which, in their different ways, added enormously to the vitality and distinction of our theater in the far-off '30s. The Odets magic was palpably at work in them; that magic which can be so explosive in its vigor and yet so sensitive in its perceptions.

More recently, in such plays as Golden Boy, Rocket to the Moon, or even in Night Music, this magic has made itself felt with increasing fitfulness. If it has been present only in this scene or in that, it has nonetheless been brilliantly present at moments even in the dramas that have lost their way. The dynamite may have diminished in its power but it has never been so dampened as it is in Clash By Night, that latest of Mr. Odets' scripts which Billy Rose presented at the Belasco on Saturday.

As is his wont, Mr. Rose, the bantam titan, has given Clash By Night the advantage of a generous production. Tallulah Bankhead, happily recovered from her recent illness, is on hand to smolder, coo, pout and erupt with all the extraordinary powers at her command in a part in which she is bound to seem slightly unbelievable. She is supposed to be a poor frustrated wife, living dully in a Staten Island bungalow among the few unpaid-for gadgets, bought on the installment plan, by means of which her husband has tried to express his love for her.

* * *

He is a great ox of a man, this husband that Lee J. Cobb acts with wonderful skill; a sort of grownup Lennie from Of Mice and Men who has ceased to be a cause of terror to either maids or mice, and finally won his rabbit farm. It is this dumb brute of a husband who forces upon his bored wife the acquaintanceship of his friend, an affluent movie operator. He even urges this easy-spender, who is played with fine restraint by Joseph Schildkraut, to stay in his home as a boarder. Needless to say, the dramatically inevitable happens. One thing does not lead to another, but to that other. And when the husband learns that he has been betrayed he slowly gathers up his thoughts and no less slowly murders the movie operator in his projection booth.

Mr. Rose's services to Clash By Night do not end with peopling it with performers of Miss Bankhead's, Mr. Cobb's, Mr. Schildkraut's or the wasted Katherine Locke's distinction. He has also called in Boris Aronson, one of the best of our designers, to place it against backgrounds which lift the grubby details of realism into theatrical significance. And Lee Strasberg has been summoned as a director to give the play that Group theater touch one associates with Mr. Odets at his best.

But Mr. Rose and his associates have ably devoted themselves to a hopeless task. Although they may rouge the cadaver, they cannot bring Mr. Odets' play to life. It is a script that moves with incredible slowness and that never seems to have any point. Once in a long while some faint betrayal of Mr. Odets' rare talent may manifest itself, but these betrayals are few and far between.

* * *

What is usually tingling in Mr. Odets' writing is here for the most part dull or rudderless. Even the tangential method of Chekov, which hitherto he has made his own in tellingly American ways, now fails Mr. Odets. His irrelevancies this time have no hidden relevance. They are mainly irrelevant, and as baffling as are those friends (now in love, now out of love) or those elder members of the family who clutter up the premises.

All in all, and in spite of the fine performances it includes, Mr. Odets' Tobacco Road version of Othello offers a dreary evening. Instead of writing like himself, Mr. Odets appears to have been hell-bent to turn out a poor copy of a sex-murder story by James M. Cain. In the case of Clash by Night, however, the postman does not even ring once.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK SUN
December 29, 1941

'Clash by Night,' Opens at the Belasco

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ALL that good acting can do for a play, exceptional acting has done for Clifford Odets's "Clash by Night," which opened Saturday evening at the Belasco. Miss Tallulah Bankhead plays the familiar role of a woman disputed with sultry brilliance; Lee J. Cobb's performance as a betrayed husband is compelling; Joseph Schildkraut portrays an encroaching boarder with sharp clarity. And if the lesser characters of the play remain in the shadows, the fault is not that of the players.

The fault, along with the other faults which make of "Clash by Night" a major disappointment, is the fault of Mr. Odets. He has written a play which is at the same time convincing and uninteresting. He has worked over, methodically, familiar materials, employing essentially stock characters and adding nothing to their stature or to their breadth or depth. The dialogue displays many of his mannerisms and few of his talents and he has taken an inconsiderately long time to say what is obviously true.

He says, in effect, that it is distressing to be at once poor and not very bright, and that to people so limited even love ends in dreary disillusion and may end in sordid violence. He proves this point by the story of a Polish carpenter and his wife and a love affair between the wife and a quicker, brighter and more affluent motion picture operator. The carpenter brings his friend home. Guilelessly he insists that his wife admire him too. Innocently he persuades the friend to rent the spare room in their Staten Island cottage. What happens thereafter is the commonplace of the theater and of American folklore, up to and including the final murder.

There is little more to the play. Other characters, evidently feeling rather out of place, enter and exit. A young couple, seeing the example before them, hesitate on the brink of marriage. A malicious old man nags the husband to violence. The people talk as they might talk, or, more exactly, as the author thinks they might talk. (I suspect that the difference here is considerable, but not essentially important.) And Mr. Odets forgets that it is not enough in the theater to tell the self-evident truth, even when the truth is saddening. It is not enough to describe believable characters, even when they are characters abused by the world. If you want to interest an audience, and if you want to write a good play, you must illuminate your scene with some special perception. It is also a good idea to tell a story which has some moments of the unexpected. All Mr. Odets has to say is that things like this happen, and isn't it too bad? And all the answer anybody can make is that it certainly is too bad.

Miss Bankhead has never, even in "The Little Foxes," played better, with more sense of character or with more feeling and intensity. Mr. Cobb brings to the character of the husband unusual comprehension and makes fully alive a pitiable, affectingly human person. Mr. Schildkraut, although he has a good deal of mannered dialogue to dispose of, brings into clear view the character the author had in mind. Miss Katherine Locke is submerged in an inessential role. Robert Ryan fares little better, and Art Smith is lost as a bit of local color. Seth Arnold is more fortunate, and plays excellently. Most of these, and the rest, are required to play very slowly by Lee Strasberg, who directed with a fond care, seting up lovingly each tiny detail of a play which is, in the last analysis, all detail and little drama.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 29, 1941

Staten Island

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

MR. ODETS'S new play is another of his probing, feverish studies of unhappy passion, with its jagged nerves raw and quivering. Played electrically by Miss Tallulah Bankhead, sardonically by Joseph Schildkraut and with remarkable force by Lee J. Cobb, this "Clash by Night," in Billy Rose's realistic production, is a turbulent drama of tortured, suffering humanity, done with intensity of feeling. Yet, with all of its tearing of emotions to tatters, it is a strangely unmoving sort of play, which shows for almost the first time the great Odets talents seeming artificial and ineffectual and the great Odets insight into the soul of lonely mankind appearing superficial. Somehow, only Mr. Cobb makes it genuinely moving.

* * *

The lack of deep emotional appeal in "Clash by Night" is by no means due to the fact that the majority of its characters are what is vaguely referred to as sordid. Such disparate dramatists as William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, Lillian Hellman and John O'Hara have proved, with considerable conclusiveness that it is quite possible to interest an audience in undesirable people. The trouble with "Clash by Night" is that, for all its brooding and sometimes eloquent talk about the passions, the feelings, the hopes, the desires and the lonely strivings of its men and women, it seldom expresses them with the strong and vastly moving compassion and understanding which are the mark of Odets at his best. What is left is a familiar triangle melodrama, rather neurotically wrought.

* * *

Here Mr. Odets is telling of the doomed lives and loves of a gentle, slow-witted giant, his sultry and discontented wife and the bitter, gaudy interloper—a motion-picture projectionist, of all things—who came between them. In the end, the lovelorn husband, driven on by his evil sex-twisted uncle, kills his rival in a projection booth, in a scene which shows Clifford Odets for almost the first time in what struck me as a fraudulent mood. As you can see, the plot is familiar stuff and the only justification for it would be that it served as the framework for a warmly sympathetic contemplation of the tragedy of unhappy people caught up in emotions that are too black and violent for their comprehension. Ordinarily Odets can observe such matters with a sort of brooding pity which is both moving and revealing, but here he rarely gets beyond the surface of his people and their tormented lives.

* * *

Although Miss Bankhead hardly manages to seem the rebellious Staten Island housewife, she plays with that vibrant air of excitement which always makes her so fascinating to watch. Mr. Schildkraut is convincing and never just a villain of melodrama as the projectionist, and in smaller and not always well written roles Miss Katherine Locke, Robert Ryan, Seth Arnold and John F. Hamilton perform ably. But it is Mr. Cobb, as the husband, who is the mainstay of the evening, giving a moving and strangely beautiful performance as the loving, bewildered husband. Mr. Cobb, I may say, is my idea of what an actor should be, and my impression at the moment is that his is the best masculine portrayal seen hereabouts since Paul Lucas arrived last season in "Watch on the Rhine." Lee Strasberg's direction and Boris Aronson's sets are helpful. This is Mr. Odets in a minor mood.

"Banjo Eyes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 26, 1941*

Cantor Sings and Prances With the Same Old Bounce

By JOHN MASON BROWN

EDDIE CANTOR remains a remarkable performer. The all-too-many years which separate his personal reappearance on Broadway last night from the Ziegfeldian days when he was cavorting in Whoopee have not diminished his vitality. Although he may now and then become a bit winded as he rushes through a song, his prancings up and down the proscenium have lost nothing of their bounce.

His eyes have not shrunk. Their great black pupils continue to toss about like sunflower centers in a stiff breeze. He still claps his hands with the old alacrity, and stalks innuendoes with his accustomed frankness. His body is lithe, agile and frenetic; his spirit is gay; and it is good to have him back.

In a swiftly changing world it is pleasant to find Mr. Cantor unchanged. If was particularly pleasant last night at the Hollywood to have him brush aside the book of Banjo Eyes near the evening's end; to see him in blackface once again, and to hear him singing such of his old favorites as Margie, Ida and If You Knew Susie.

* * *

These songs are all of them memories one is happy to revive. But I doubt if, in a similar mood of retrospection a decade hence, Mr. Cantor will find anything he will want to sing from his newest vehicle. I know I did not find much in it that I will desire or bother to remember after tonight, except for the fortunately unchanging Mr. Cantor, and I look forward to seeing him in a gayer, hence worthier, musical.

Banjo Eyes, you see, is a musical comedy, opulently staged though militantly routine in its character, which is derived from Three Men On a Horse. Now Three Men On a Horse was, of course, that immensely funny farce about the little Greeting Card poet whose real genius was for predicting what would happen at the racetracks. Quillian and Ellinson have taken their rightful liberties in writing a musical comedy version of John Cecil Holm's and George Abbott's play. But the sad truth is that a very funny farce has now bobbed up as a musical which ought to be much more amusing than it is. The pathos, the giddy insanity and convulsing desperation of the original are at present stated for the most part in the terms of a perfectly humdrum, often flat, and certainly uninspired song-and-dance show.

In addition to Mr. Cantor, the production has its scattering of likable features. In particular, it can boast its delightful dream sequences in which some very mortal horses appear, most lovabe of which is Banjo Eyes, that quadruped who, with Mayo and Morton to humanize his extremities, confides in this version the outcome of future races to the little Greeting Card poet when he is dreaming.

* * *

Harry Horner has set Mr. Cantor's vehicle expensively, and with distinction in the case of the fanciful interludes. Irene Sharaff has gowned it lavishly. And such good people as Hassard Short, the new De Marcos and Audrey Christie are among those on hand to do their expert bit by the production, the dancing and the acting.

Even so, it is hard to become enthusiastic about Banjo Eyes. It is meant for those who not only like Mr. Cantor (which is easy enough to do) but who also do not mind musical comedies when they are being just like all other indifferent musical comedies, with some vaudeville and night club talent thrown in. Judging from the reactions of last night's audience, however, I am happy to report that there seems to be plenty of theatregoers who dote on both.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 26, 1941*

"Banjo Eyes" Brings Eddie Cantor Back

"Banjo Eyes," a musical comedy by Izzy Ellinson and Joe Quillan, suggested by Cecil Holm's "Three Men on a Horse," lyrics by John Latouche; music by Vernon Duke. Produced by Albert Lewis at the Hollywood Theatre, New York, Dec. 25, 1941.

★ ★ ★–

By BURNS MANTLE

THEY are generous, these lads who first desert Broadway for Hollywood and the radio, and then come back to remind us of older and happier days in the theatre. First there was Al Jolson, and then there was George Jessel. And now here is Eddie Cantor, and he the most generous of the three.

In "Banjo Eyes" the Cantor production is expansive and lavish, and the list of principals is topped with a half dozen specialty dancers of exceptional skill. Eddie also goes back to blackface just to please his following, which is numerous and loyal.

He has had a little trouble with his librettists, the Messrs. Izzy Ellinson and Joe Quillan. They, I suspect, also hail from Hollywood, and haven't quite assimilated the Broadway touch.

It has been their job to tear apart the Cecil Holm-George Abbott farce about a timid greeting card salesman who got tight and was shanghaied by a trio of race horse touts. And then try to put it together again, leaving spaces for songs and dances. You will remember it as "Three Men On a Horse."

Cutting Trouble.

The trouble, I suspect, is that the original play was too closely knit a comedy to be thus roughly treated. Too much has been lost in the cutting to hold the story taut, and not enough has been added in the splicing to make up for the loss.

There is an amusing touch of fantasy in which Eddie goes back to the stables and fraternizes with the horses whenever he falls asleep. Marvelous talking horses that can also sing you a Vernon Duke melody if urged. Morton and Mayo are the horse stars.

The horse scenes and the dancing specialties are the best of "Banjo Eyes," outside the lively Eddie himself. There is a Lynn, Royce and Vanya trio that has been doing the picture houses and that thrillingly combines the adagio with a Hartman touch of burlesque.

Whirling Gloria.

And there is a girl named Gloria Gilbert who can whirl you more and faster whirls on a single toe than anyone you've seen before, if you have not seen Gloria.

And there is also the new DeMarco team, Sally replacing Renee, and contributing a series of lively rhythms of her own that are arresting. She is wise, probably, in not attempting the ballroom sequences of her gifted predecessor.

In blackface Mr. Cantor revives the old songs, the one about "Ida," the one about "Margie," and several others. These are happy reminders for the Cantor crowd, and Eddie is as lively doing them as he was a dozen years ago.

Vernon Duke's score is lively; Hassard Short's staging includes a couple of nice turntable effects and effective lighting; Irene Sharaff's costumes are striking; John Latouche has written most of the lyrics and Charles Walters has staged the dances with emphasis on the jigging.

"Banjo Eyes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *December 26, 1941*

Mr. Cantor Returns

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

AFTER ten years or so of engaging in such eccentric activities as the cinema and the radio, Eddie Cantor is back again in musical comedy where he belongs. There is something particularly appealing about our veteran comics; something especially winning and likable in their manner. Not only do they know their business with almost scholarly expertness, but they possess a style of their own, which tends to make them performers of a classic stature. When Mr. Cantor comes out upon the stage and starts darting about with frantic energy or when he dons blackface and sings his favorite songs to us, you know that you are in the presence of a man of parts, and, if you are a theatergoer of some years' standing, you find yourself growing a bit sentimental, too.

* * *

Mr. Cantor's current vehicle is appropriately enough known as "Banjo Eyes," and its book is based, with some fidelity, on the popular stage farce called "Three Men on a Horse." Despite the general admiration for "Three Men on a Horse," I was somehow never a great enthusiast for it, and it seems to me that as a musical show libretto the story of the greeting card poet, with a gift for picking the right race horses, is every bit as much at home as it was as a play without music. Fortunately, too much of the tale of Erwin and the racetrack gentlemen who took him in hand is not given us, since there must be time out for songs and dances, and the plot suffices as a springboard for the Cantor antics. The music is not exceptional but the dancing is fine and there is a genial air of festivity about the proceedings which is pleasantly enlivening.

* * *

There is one attractive song called "We're Having a Baby," which Mr. Cantor and Miss June Clyde sing delightfully, but on the whole the music by Vernon Duke and the lyrics by John Latouche are agreeable, rather than distinguished. The dancing is more remarkable. There are, for example, Tony De Marco and the new Mrs. De Marco, and they are fine, as dancing De Marcos always seem to be. The field of burlesque ballroom dancing is inclined to be limited, but a team, new to me, called Lynn, Royce and Vanya gives a new and hilarious freshness to it. Then, from time to time, other terpsichorean experts emerge attractively and adeptly, including the remarkable racehorse called Banjo Eyes. The impersonation of this excellent steed by a pair of modest character actors called Mayo and Morton is one of the agreeable things about the new show.

Another commendable feature is the appearance of a number of the show girls and the chorus girls, to make a class distinction between them. Quite a few of them deserve more than passing mention. Carrying on the plot are Miss Audrey Christie, Lionel Stander, Ray Mayer and Bill Johnson, and all of them are of assistance, with Miss Christie being particularly helpful. The costumes are colorful and attractive, and the settings are in the proper mood. So "Banjo Eyes," despite the fact that it is exceptional in neither music nor book, has a nice, lively carnival air about it and a generally festive manner. The important thing, though, is that it brings back to us one of the distinguished performers of the musical comedy stage and serves to remind us of something which his activities on screen and wireless may have tended to obscure—that Eddie Cantor is in the great tradition.

'Banjo Eyes'

A musical comedy in two acts; book by Quillan and Ellinson, based on "Three Men on a Horse," by John Cecil Holm and George Abbott; lyrics by John Latouche; music by Vernon Duke; additional lyrics by Harold Adamson; staged by Hassard Short; dances by Charles Walters; settings by Harry Horner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; presented on December 25, 1941, at the Hollywood Theatre by Albert Lewis. The cast:

Miss Clark	Jacqueline Susann
Mr. Carver	E. J. Blunkall
Erwin Trowbridge	Eddie Cantor
Sally Trowbridge	June Clyde
Harry, the Bartender	Richard Rober
Charlie	Bill Johnson
Ginger	Virginia Mayo
The De Marcos,	Sally and Tony De Marco
Patsy	Lionel Stander
Frankie	Ray Mayer
Mabel	Audrey Christie
Tommy	Tommy Wonder
The General	John Ervin
The Captain	James Farrell
The Filly	Ronnie Cunningham
"Banjo Eyes"	Mayo and Morton
The Quartett,	George Richmond, Phil Shafer, Doug Hawkins, George Lovesee

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 26, 1941*

"Banjo Eyes" Brings Eddie Cantor Back to Broadway

By WILELLA WALDORF

EDDIE CANTOR, who has been absent from the Broadway stage since the closing of "Whoopee," returned last night in a new musical comedy named "Banjo Eyes," after a horse.

Although the program at the Hollywood Theatre cautiously states that the book is based on "a play by John Cecil Holm and George Abbott," it is no secret that "Banjo Eyes" is a musical version of "Three Men on a Horse." Since this happens to have been one of Mr. Abbott's funniest farces, the "Banjo Eyes" plot is sturdier than most, and the role of Erwin Trowbridge, the $25-a-week writer of greeting card verses who dreams about horses and invariably picks the winners, turns out to be a particularly happy role for Mr. Cantor.

The surroundings, of course, are infinitely more elegant, but on the whole Erwin's adventures with the gamblers who make a fortune from his horse-racing tips follow the original play fairly closely, with songs and dances and elaborately gowned showgirls tossed in from time to time in the musical comedy tradition. The songs are not precisely inspired, but they serve the purpose of providing rhythms for the dancers, who are numerous. Tony DeMarco and his new partner, Sally DeMarco, do some fancy stepping in the bustling DeMarco fashion, and a trio known as Lynn, Royce and Vanya put on something in the nature of a burlesque adagio number that is probably harder to perform than the more serious variety.

Along toward the end there is a military episode featuring a squad of soldier chorus boys shouting "We'll Do It Again" in march rhythm, garnering much patriotic applause, and followed by a short session in which Mr. Cantor, who happens to have borrowed a private's uniform, has trouble getting his trousers on in time for drill.

"Banjo Eyes," in fact, has all the musical comedy fixings, including snappy, easily shifted scenery by Harry Horner, colorful costumes by Irene Sharaff, giddy dance routines by Charles Walters and expert direction by Hassard Short, but its most enjoyable moments are those in which Erwin is struggling to fill his quota of Mother's Day verses in time to meet the deadline, while Lionel Stander and Ray Mayer are bent on keeping him hard at the business of picking winners at the races.

Dreams About Horses

To this end he has two musical comedy dreams, for all the world like Gertrude Lawrence in "Lady in the Dark" except that Cantor's dreams are full of beguiling stage horses, and he does not feel called upon to consult a psychiatrist. Banjo Eyes herself is the gayest horse in the stable and it is she who gives Erwin so much advance information about the racing business.

As the gamblers' girl friend, Audrey Christie is her old amusing self, though she has disappointingly little to do, and June Clyde is attractive as the wife who manages to dress amazingly well on Erwin's $25 a week. Bill Johnson sings a couple of songs in a pleasant baritone and an Army uniform.

But it is Cantor's show, and very amusing he is from start to finish. His drunk scene in the hotel bar is particularly hilarious. The song writers have not supplied him with anything world-shattering to sing, but when he begins the familiar Cantor routine, sprinting along close to the footlights, vibrating with energy and good spirits, the audience—at least the more elderly portion of it—is reminded of the old Ziegfeld days. And just before the finale, out he comes in blackface, as of yore, to warble some of his hits of yesteryear.

Altogether, an entertaining evening, due chiefly to Mr. Cantor and "Three Men on a Horse."

"Banjo Eyes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *December 26, 1941*

'Banjo Eyes' Opens at the Hollywood

Eddie Cantor Returns as Bright as Ever in Musical Based on Stage Farce

By JOHN ANDERSON

EDDIE CANTOR has come back after all these years, his eyes a-poppin,' and his bounce as bright as ever, to preside over an opulent musical comedy called "Banjo Eyes," based on "Three Men On a Horse," and presented by Albert Lewis at the Hollywood Theatre last night. A huge audience saluted the return of the native, and at the end, when he went into his famous blackface with white-rimmed glasses and white-gloved pat-a-cake and revived some of his best known songs there was all the affectionate and warming applause that has a special sound when Broadway puts its heart in its hands.

As one of the great personalities that surrounded Ziegfeld, Mr. Cantor was a national institution long before he went into the movies or on the air. Anyone with a piece of burnt cork and a pair of prancing feet could and probably did try to imitate or impersonate him, but no one else could touch the happy impishness of the little man whose wild eyes roamed around their sockets like a pair of lost marbles and became the trademark of an authentic comedian and a perennial favorite.

To say that Mr. Cantor is as good as ever is to say that he is still the top of his particular works. In returning to the stage he has selected for his vehicle the musical version of one of the most popular farces of our time, and certainly one of the funniest. Since he is a superb farceur this ought to make a perfect combination and yet somehow the evening isn't quite up to the level of its separate ingredients. The chief trouble with "Banjo Eyes" is that it makes both Mr. Cantor and "Three Men On a Horse" seem less funny than they have any right to be.

Goofy Hilarity

Very little of the sweetly innocent and goofy hilarity of the original play is retained in the present version, and while there are some spectacular substitutes in the way of scenery and ballet the show lacks spontaneity, and spontaneity is Mr. Cantor's trump card.

Unlike the quieter comics, he must be always going places and doing things. He is funniest at top speed. "Banjo Eyes" slows down now and then to a quiet saunter. Its best moments, unfortunately, do not belong to its star.

For the best of it is the showmanship of Mr. Short's production, the brilliant dancing, Mr. Horner's gay and swiftly moving scenery, and especially the jockey ballet in the first act, wherein Erwin, the fellow who could dope the races without fail, meets his dream horses in a fantastic paddock, decked out in some of Miss Sharaff's most beguiling costumes.

The DeMarcos flit through its scenes in swirling elegance, Gloria Gilbert has an attractive solo, Ronnie Cunningham dances a fine filly, Tommy Wonder performs, as they say, wonders, and a team called Lynn, Royce and Vanya do some remarkable knockabout adagios.

It is, of course, nothing new for Mr. Cantor, with his Ziegfeld upbringing, to be surrounded by such showmanship or embellished by such dancers and such chorus girls. His trouble here (which was never the trouble at the New Amsterdam) is that the trimmings seem to put him slightly into eclipse. This isn't exactly fair to a man who is strong enough comedian to hold the stage by himself.

Cantor's Sketches

The songs he is given out of Vernon Duke's rather undistinguished score are not the most suitable and the lyrics are not very amusing, so he is at his best in the earlier sketches when the show is nearest the original play. The bar scene when he meets the race track gang is his liveliest. He is ably assisted in the story by June Clyde and Audrey Christie, in two delightful performances, and there is a resounding army chorus shouting death to the Axis, led valiantly by James Farrell.

Thus it seems I must, in brief, report that "Banjo Eyes" is a lovely and spectacular show which doesn't celebrate Mr. Cantor's return as well as it should. But the fact that he has returned is all to the good.

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THEATRE REVIEWS

"Banjo Eyes"

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," *December 26, 1941*

Old Banjo Eyes Tips a Gay Wink At His Old Self

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT WAS an old-fashioned Christmas, in spite of the war, with Eddie Cantor back on Broadway last night for the first time since the now half-legendary Ziegfeld era. He looks older, of course, but the eyes still pop and the feet still work their way with remarkable speed and nimbleness all over the stage. The crowd loved it when, around 11:15, he put on blackface and sang *Ida* and *Margie* and *If You Knew Susy*, but it wasn't necessary so far as revealing the famous Cantor personality was concerned. The personality remains pretty much intact. If it hasn't gathered any momentum with the years, neither has it gathered any moss. Eddie still—like most of the musical headliners of his generation—knows just how to handle himself on the stage, and how to hold an audience. His brilliant footwork in a style that can be parodied far better than it can be imitated, still seems to me his one really first-rate talent; his comedy and singing are agreeable and personal enough, but not in the same league.

The show which marks his return is strictly from Broadway—loud, strenuous and bouncing, with nothing even faintly sophisticated about it except Irene Sharaff's handsome costumes and perhaps one dance by the new de Marco team. In a strictly critical sense, it can best be described as a bad show but not a dull one. The book manages to retain the plot of *Three Men on a Horse* without holding fast to anything that made it funny. The gags have been fetched by the bushel-basket from the corn belt. The dancing is unimaginative, the music undistinguished. They've even rushed in with the first of the freedom's-torch songs that Broadway has acquired since war was declared—a noisy patrioteering tune that runs *We Did It Before and We Can Do It Again*.

Yet, though *Banjo Eyes* can, critically, be stripped to its drawers, in its own Broadway fashion it's lively and entertaining enough. It keeps moving. It has assurance. The dancing has life to it, however much it lacks style. The chorus is pretty enough. And Mr. Cantor is seldom off-stage long enough to get to his dressing room and back. If this kind of show has to turn up, and I guess it has to, I'll cheerfully settle for nothing worse than last night's version of it. *Banjo Eyes* is aimed at mass consumption, and I feel fairly confident that it will be mass-consumed.

The cast is helpful. June Clyde is attractive and Audrey Christie vivacious. Lionel Stander and Harry Mayer turn in pleasant if not too spirited performances. And the new deMarco team, if by no means up to the old, still knows how to dance. Mr. La Touche's lyrics, however, seem to me as disappointing as Mr. Duke's music; they not only lack sparkle, they even indulge in some appalling false rhymes.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 26, 1941*

Eddie Cantor Reappears in a Lavish Musical Called 'Banjo Eyes'

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

EDDIE CANTOR got around to coming back to Broadway last evening, showing up at the Hollywood Theatre in the middle of a large musical called "Banjo Eyes." This makes a pleasant Christmas gift for Mr. Cantor's admirers, a select group numbering hundreds of thousands and including this reviewer, and is also an extremely lucky break for the producer, to say nothing of the authors and composer, of "Banjo Eyes." "Banjo Eyes" is most easily described as a musical which needs Eddie Cantor.

Well, it has him. He plays Erwin Trowbridge, that same Erwin, the little greeting card man, who bobbed his browbeaten way through "Three Men on a Horse," beginning way back yonder in 1935. The book of "Banjo Eyes" has been whittled down from the John Cecil Holm-George Abbott farce, and prettied up a little, and it is still good for its share of laugher. And Mr. Cantor is practically an ideal Erwin, wriggling in the fell clutch of gamblers and dreaming his race-track winners in a fantastic world made up of talking horses. (And chorus girls made up to look a little like horses, but mostly like pretty girls.) He gets most of his tips from a mare named Banjo Eyes. It is not, a little to my surprise, Mr. Cantor who plays the title role.

Mr. Cantor is gay and comical. He is a funny drunk and he has curious experiences with Mabel, the gambler's girl friend, and he scribbles away busily on rhymes to celebrate Mother's Day. And he tries to get a dollar more a week so that he and his wife Sally can have a baby, and promises Banjo Eyes not to pass on the tips—straight from the horse's mouth if tips ever were—and generally enlivens the pleasantly nonsensical plot. This is one time, incidently, when a musical could do with more plot. A good deal of the Holm-Abbott merriment has been shelved in favor of production numbers.

Mr. Cantor prances and sings, also. He and June Clyde have a charming song, very much in Mr. Cantor's vein, called "We're Having a Baby." He also sings, on tumultuous demand, some of his old songs. You remember about Margie? And about Susie? And about making whoopee? You can hear them all again, with Eddie back in blackface.

The De Marcos dance when Mr. Cantor is resting, the girls flock prettily around, Audrey Christie and Lionel Stander act amusingly and everything is lavish. It is, except for Mr. Cantor, rather routine lavishness, and as a result the star's absences from the scene often seem pretty long. But he always does come back, and that is what counts. A better blending of the farce and sing-song ingredients would have done no harm, of course, and neither would more imaginative staging. Probably the producers thought Mr. Cantor ought to be enough to satisfy anybody and, come to think of it, I guess he is.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES,
December 26, 1941

Eddie Cantor Is Up to His Old Prancing Tricks in a Wide and Funny Broadway Musical Comedy Called 'Banjo Eyes'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

GREETINGS, Eddie! Eddie Cantor, that is. After slumming through some opulent years in other forms of show business, Mr. Cantor has decided to return to the stage in "Banjo Eyes," which was opened at the Hollywood last evening. That is one of the best decisions he has decided for some time. For Mr. Cantor is a very funny fellow, indeed, and "Banjo Eyes" is just the sort of Broadway show to stretch around him.

If memory serves, he is not quite so scrawny in the cheeks as he used to be. Any changes there may be in his personality are also for the better in the direction of softer amiability. Otherwise, he is the same briskly hopping singer of songs who prances rapidly from wing to wing and claps his hands with a kind of flutter to simulate excitement. As an intoxicated greeting-card poet Mr. Cantor is uproarious. He also goes through the routine burlesque of an awkward squad rookie with a lot of slapstick merriment. It is good to make Mr. Cantor's acquaintance again over the footlights. He is a highly individualized song-man and buffoon.

* * *

As a musical comedy "Banjo Eyes" has all the appurtenances of a big, noisy show. To supply a book Quillan and Ellinson have dirtied up the plot of "Three Men on a Horse" sufficiently to make it acceptable to the musical stage. Vernon Duke has written a vibrant score of metallic music and John Latouche has done some witty handsprings for lyrics. The yarn about the little greeting-card rhymer who has a mystic genius for picking nags is not only a good one for Mr. Cantor, but also for Lionel Stander, the low-life bruiser of the movies, and Audrey Christie, the honky-tonk czarina. As things are going in the world today it is something to hear Mr. Stander count one, two, three in a whisky voice and to see Miss Christie heat a lullaby.

Among the simple pleasures, you can also reckon on the friskiness of a horse, played, fore and aft, by Mayo and Morton. And you will be pleased also with the clowning of Lynn, Royce and Vanya in an elegant dance number. For "Banjo Eyes" believes in humor quite far down in the diaphragm. None of your intellectual snickering for Mr. Cantor's friends.

* * *

What with one thing or another, the girls are most attractive, dressed in style by Irene Sharaff, and directed in some modishly bizarre dances by Charles Walters. Every now and then the De Marcos are sliding and swinging through their toney ballroom measures. Tommy Wonder, the muscular marvel, does gymnastics to dance music, and Gloria Gilbert, the ballerina, is a pirouetting fool.

Toward the end of the evening Mr. Cantor pops on in blackface with white bone glasses to discharge some of his old songs. It is pleasant to discover that the new songs delivered in the current manner are vastly more enjoyable. "I'll Take the City" and "We're Having a Baby," sung with the Cantor eyes and feet, are much more exhilarating. The formula of the Broadway show does not change much, but the tempo and rhythm of song-writing are keener. Mr. Cantor's nervous pitch is good for modern music. He is an excellent man for a laugh, song and good time in general.

"Letters to Lucerne"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 24, 1941*

"Letters to Lucerne" a Human And Moving Drama of the War

"Letters to Lucerne," drama by Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Cort Theatre, New York, Dec. 23, 1941.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THIS, I think, is the first of the newer war dramas to command serious attention. "Letters to Lucerne," it is called, and it is a simple and human story of a half dozen students attending a finishing school for young women in Switzerland at the outbreak of the second, or current, world war.

One girl is German, inevitably, if there is to be drama; one Polish, one French, one English and two American. One American is from the North (probably the upper East Side, seeing that she swears easily), and one from the South who is cute.

Comes the variety of rumors preceding Munich and the girls are not disturbed. They love each other; they love Madam; they play their interesting game of reading their letters aloud in dormitory; the sun shines and there is always that beautiful snow-capped view of a lovely world outside.

Then Comes Trouble

But then comes Czecho-Slovakia. And Poland. And there is trouble. England and France must take sides against Germany, with Southern America putting in a mischievous word or two.

Erna of Germany can no longer read her letters. Tries to hide them in fact. Olga of Poland (who loves Erna's brother Hans, incidentally) cannot take the death of her mother and father in the bombing of Warsaw and still feel the same toward Erna.

Madam Hunter tries desperately to hold this disturbed remnant of her school together; tries to preach the broader humanity that must hold intelligent, understanding humans together if civilization is to endure; tries to stir the sympathy of the allies for the victims of their enemies.

Partly she succeeds, but not until unhappy Erna has been driven to a desperate misery and the human weaknesses of her emotionally swayed pals have been ruthlessly exposed.

In the end there is an emotional compromise that is frankly of the theatre but completely holding. At least it was completely holding with last night's audience, which also sat tense and silent through several preceding scenes.

This ending covers the reading of Erna's last letter, and it gives Grete Mosheim, a Berlin refugee since 1934, who is making her American debut, a chance to prove the quality of her finished skill as an actress.

Miss Mosheim, older than her sisters of the cast, is still able artfully to conceal this fact through the earlier and happier scenes. Which permits her to age tragically in the later emotional scenes and adds appeal to her fine performance.

Nice Girls

All six girls are a credit to their more or less distinguished parents, and to the stage for which they were trained. Sonya Stokowski plays the Polish Olga with attractive youthfulness. Phyllis Avery adds charm to her honey chile of the South. Nancy Wiman, save for a nervous tendency to slur her speeches, is a happy choice for the upper East Side American.

Mary Barthelmess, playing French Felice, must have pleased, Dick, her father, who someone said was looking on pridefully from a mid-orchestra location. And Faith Brook, whose father, Clive, was directing American plays when you and I were younger, Mag, did honor to the spirit, if not the tolerance, of the well born Britishers.

Katherine Alexander is back, which is good, and is playing the headmistress with feeling and a nice motherly discretion. There are also excellent performances in the shorter supporting roles by Lilia Skala, Beatrice de Neergaard, Alfred Hesse, and Carl Gose.

Also a couple of handsome settings by Raymond Sovey and good direction by John Baird. I think you are going to be glad "Letters to Lucerne," has been brought to you. It was written in Europe, I assume, by Fritz Rotter and perhaps in America by Allen Vincent.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 24, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Letters to Lucerne"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "Letters to Lucerne," which was acted at the Cort last evening, Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent have written a tender play about a harsh topic. They show what effect the war has on the friendships of six girls who live in an international school in Switzerland. Thanks to the ingenuity of the casting, the girls are acted by the daughters of big-wigs and nabobs, which is not a bad idea after all. For the junior misses of Mrs. Hunter's School are enchantingly well assorted.

Probably one should give one's heart to this sweet-spirited play and its little sadnesses without a tremendous whirring of the intellect. Mr. Rotter and Mr. Vincent can write their best scenes with poignant simplicity. But "Letters to Lucerne" never gets much beyond proving that it is hard for French, English and Polish girls to be fair to a German schoolmate. It seems like a small point to be making against a great theme.

• • •

When the play opens near Lucerne late in the Summer of 1939 the girls are just returning to school after the recess. Under the protection of a wise and pleasant schoolmistress they are living an idyllic life apart from the hatreds of the world. In their dormitory at night it is their custom to read aloud their letters from home. When the war breaks out Mrs. Hunter hopes to keep the school isolated from the terrible things that are happening outside. But the letters carry the bitterness in. The braggart letters the German girl receives from home pack the school against her. Some of the news, especially from Poland, is devastating. Although the German girl is not responsible for it she is charged with the blame. Ultimately the authors manage to absolve her completely in a concluding letter that is beautifully written and exquisitely well read by Grete Mosheim, a talented German actress.

• • •

No matter how you look at it, a girls' school has its limitations as a laboratory for world problems. Mrs. Hunter's school seems to be more placid than most. Between the crucial scenes the gabble is pleasantly innocuous. In another five years these girls will probably be wreaking havoc wherever they go, tying their men up in knots and creating daily crises. But at the moment when Mr. Rotter and Mr. Vincent seize hold of them, they are beguiling and well-behaved, without much else. For they are not deeply characterized in the writing. What they suffer is touching but trifling compared to the agony of the world.

• • •

Serving as scene-designer, Raymond Sovey has housed them in a cool assembly hall and a soothing dormitory with well-bred appointments. John Baird has directed the performance with more competence than invention. Five of the girls have chosen notable fathers. Sonya Stokowski's is Leopold, the baton-shaker; Phyllis Avery's is Stephen Morehouse Avery, littérateur; Nancy Wiman's papa is the producer, trying to keep her salary at home; Mary Barthelmess's is Richard, the bravura actor, and Faith Brook's is Clive, the English mummer. Nancy Wiman's old man has taught her the most about acting.

• • •

As the German girl, Miss Mosheim, who is making her debut here in English, gives a sensitively moving performance. The headmistress is played by Katherine Alexander with the warmth and pride of an uncommonly lovely actress. Lilia Skala plays a servant with an aureate wholesomeness that ought to be useful in better parts. As a teacher in the school, Beatrice De Neergaard gives a neat performance. Alfred A. Hesse is on hand as a smiling, unctuous gardener in the peasant tradition.

The opening-night audience was the creepiest of the season. A sturdier play than "Letters to Lucerne" would have had difficulty in surviving such a barrage of coughs, barks and strangles.

"Letters to Lucerne"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 24, 1941*

Rotter's and Vincent's Play, Letters to Lucerne, Is Offered

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH Dwight Deere Wiman has assembled some charming young players for Letters to Lucerne, Fritz Rotter's and Allen Vincent's new war play at the Cort, proves to be infinitely less moving than it should. In fact, it does not prove to be moving at all, even though you keep thinking that it is going to be so, and hoping that it will.

If it forces you to watch the procession (occasionally with quickened interest) without ever quite permitting you to become a part of it, the reasons are not hard to find. There are several of them. And they insist upon calling attention to themselves.

To begin with, a trick underlies the writing of Mr. Rotter's and Mr. Vincent's study of how the war destroys the peace of a girls' school in Switzerland. The trick is having the students in this International House establish their characters, their nationalities and the progress of the conflict when Germany was invading Poland by reading aloud in their dormitory at bedtime the letters they have received from their various homes. As a long series of letters so read out loud soon becomes about as animated as a series of papers read before a literary society, these notes (especially when the mails continue to arrive) turn out to be not only a stuntish but a static devise.

* * *

Then, the bland assumption of Mr. Rotter's and Mr. Vincent's headmistress in Letters to Lucerne that her students can continue to enjoy uninterrupted peace and keep their heads when the world around them is at war seems unduly optimistic. Moreover, even when you have forgotten the first act's snail-like deliberation, you cannot help realizing that, though the authors have stated a plea for humanity in individual human judgments, they have not got around to writing their play. At least, not to dramatizing it. Finally, you are forced to wonder (and given ample time in which to do so) if the feuds and whisperings, the love affairs and dormitory bickerings of little girls of boarding-school age are not a pathetically inadequate sounding-board for the horrors and passions, the cruelties and devastation of war.

To be sure, Mr. Rotter and Mr. Vincent do tell a story of a kind. In terms of a Polish, a French, an English girl and two Americans, they do show how the German girl in the school is abused by her classmates after Hitler's march on Warsaw. The Polish girl was in love with the German girl's brother, who is now in the air forces. And the German student becomes an outcast when news comes that the Polish girl's father and mother have been killed by bombs. She is cleared only when she reads a letter from her mother in which her mother expresses her hatred of the present regime and her pride because her son chose to destroy himself and his plane rather than attack Poland. But somehow, though the firewood is all there for a play, Mr. Rotter and Mr. Vincent have forgotten to apply the match.

* * *

Mr. Wiman has given this unignited though literate an often sensitive script an expert production. Mr. Sovey has set it well and Mr. Baird has directed it with skill. And those young daughters of illustrious fathers—Sonya Stokowski, Phyllis Avery, Nancy Wiman, Mary Barthelmess and Faith Brook—act and look in a way to make their parents proud. As the little German, Grete Mosheim proves herself to be an exceptional player. She is far less mannered than Elizabeth Bergner, and is possessed of an intensity matched only by her simplicity.

Even so, I am afraid Letters to Lucerne deposits itself at the Dead-Letter Office, which is very much of a pity.

'LETTERS TO LUCERNE'

A play in three acts by Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent; staged by John Baird; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented at the Cort Theater on December 23, 1941, by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast:

Olga Kirinski	Sonya Stokowski
Gustave	Alfred A. Hesse
Erna Schmidt	Grete Mosheim
Gretchen Linder	Beatrice de Neergaard
Hans Schmidt	Carl Gose
Margarethe	Lilia Skala
Mrs. Hunter	Katherine Alexander
Bingo Hill	Nancy Wiman
Felice Renoir	Mary Barthelmess
Sally Jackson	Phyllis Avery
Marion Curwood	Faith Brook
Francois	Kenneth Bates
Koppler	Harald Dyrenforth

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 24, 1941*

"Letters to Lucerne" a War Play Laid in a Girls' School

By WILELLA WALDORF

"LETTERS TO LUCERNE," the new play produced by Dwight Deere Wiman last night at the Cort Theatre, pictures the dawn of World War No. II over a select young ladies' seminary in Switzerland. When Germany marches into Poland and most of the students hasten back to their homes, a sextette of seniors decides to stay on, and Mrs. Hunter, the head-mistress, hopes to keep the brutality and bitterness of the conflict outside their mountain retreat.

But the sextette consists of Erna from Berlin and her best friend, Olga of Warsaw, plus a French girl, a Britisher, and two Americans, one a Southerner inserted purely for purposes of comic relief.

They have a habit of reading their mail to one another in their elegant dormitory every night before turning out the bedside lamps, and everything is very snug and chummy until Hitler and his fliers suddenly swoop down on Warsaw.

While Polish Olga sits silently by, stunned at the sudden turn in world affairs, a coalition of French and British, supported by the amusing but somewhat addle-pated Southern floweret, begins a sniping attack on German Erna, whose fond mother writes glowing accounts (acceptable to the censor) of the success of the Fatherland's armed forces, including the exploits of Brother Hans, who happens to be engaged to Olga.

American Peace Effort

Bingo, the New Yorker whose financial affairs are all managed with great efficiency by the Guaranty Trust Company, nobly endeavors to keep the peace without much success, and the climactic moment is reached when Olga, in a trembling voice, reads a letter from her cousin in Warsaw informing her of the death of her father and mother in a bombing raid.

This is, of course, the most moving scene in the play, which is effectively acted by all six of the young ladies, and it is the big moment toward which the authors have been working for two acts. Affecting as it is, we might have found it more genuinely heart-wringing had it not been so carefully and obviously contrived by playwrights determined to tear an audience to tatters.

It was, unfortunately, impossible for us to believe that a young girl whose family was being bombed in Warsaw could possibly have been so afraid to read a letter from that city that she saved it all day, only to open it at precisely the tense dramatic moment at bedtime. It would have been quite simple, surely, to have got around this difficulty by some such device as having Olga receive a cable at the proper time, but "Letters to Lucerne," despite its interesting theme, is unfortunately far from adroit as a play.

Its initial exposition is awkwardly set forth and the audience's attention is permitted to wander a good deal in the course of the evening. Although, with such a subject, it mght be supposed some rather vital matters of international import would have come up for discussion, the letters and the talk that they occasion are kept for the most part on an elementary plane. This is, of course, consistent with the fact that the main characters are adolescents, but it makes it difficult to become absorbed in the play, which depends chiefly on one or two touching scenes provided by the persecution of the bewildered German girl.

Six Young Actresses

Grete Mosheim, who plays the unfortunate Erna, is a German actress who left her native land shortly after the beginning of the Hitler regime. She is a little old for the part of a school girl but she plays with understanding and deep feeling. Sonya Stokowski, daughter of Leopold Stokowski and Olga Samaroff, is very touching as her Polish school-mate, while Mary Barthelmess, daughter of Richard Barthelmess and Mary Hay, displays poise and charm as the French Felice.

Clive Brook's daughter Faith acts the Britisher pleasantly, with very little of what is called "an English accent," and the producer's daughter Nancy Wiman brings an engaging, straight-forward quality to the role of the more intelligent of the two Americans. As the nit-wit Southern wisp, Phyllis Avery not only sounds like something out of a minstrel show, but uses her chirping equipment to considerable comic effect.

Beatrice de Neergaard plays a school-mistress of German origin convincingly, but we thought Katherine Alexander completely miscast as Mrs. Hunter, head of the school. She managed to get very little out of a part that was neither particularly well-written nor suited to her style of playing.

The authors of "Letters to Lucerne" have hit upon a novel background for a war play, and provided several interesting and moving scenes. On the whole, however, they display neither technical facility nor sufficient brilliance of thought to turn out a really fine drama on this theme. The six young actresses involved are worth seeing, but their vehicle is only occasionally successful.

"Letters to Lucerne"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 24, 1941*

'Letters to Lucerne,' a Merely Touching Play, Opens at the Cort

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THERE are a good many ways to approach the human problems raised by war and perhaps the oblique way is better than most in the theater. The authors of "Letters to Lucerne," which opened at the Cort last evening, have chosen that method, reflecting the war in the reducing mirror provided by a girls' school in Switzerland—a school in which girls of many nationalities are living together happily until the first day of September, 1939.

The war comes to the girls in letters from home; in letters from England and France, in tragic news from Poland, in triumphant letters from a Germany on the march. The girls have a habit of reading aloud excerpts from their letters in the dormitory at night, and for a while after the war starts they continue this custom. The results are foregone—they are, indeed, too foregone for the good of the play which Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent have fashioned out of real materials and in which they touch on real problems. It is partly because of the inevitability of the plot's events that "Letters to Lucerne" misses so much of the poignancy it should attain.

Long before the authors are ready to tell you, you know that Erna Schmidt will be the victim of persecution by the English and French girls; that amusing little Sally from the American South will join in out of sheer malice; that Olga's parents will be killed in Warsaw and that emotional problems will be raised which will be beyond the authors' power to solve. For Erna is as decent a human as any of them and does not deserve to carry the obloquy of her nation's attack on civilization. But Olga's feelings are at least as real, and are complicated when she hears that Erna's brother, whom she loves, has been one of those who bombed Warsaw. And it is all too easy to understand the emotions of the girls from France and England.

Thus there is raised that always tragically difficult human problem that comes out of war: How can we remember that men and women are not their nations, and fight states without persecuting individuals? Mr. Rotter and Mr. Vincent do not, I am sorry to say, answer this question. At the end, in an admittedly touching scene, they merely beg it. They disclose that Erna's brother and her father and mother are not really Nazi at heart, and imply that it is now all right for the other girls to love her again. That has nothing to do with the case. It is merely a way out of a dilemma and a neat bit of sentiment to end a play.

So, for all its charm, "Letters to Lucerne" comes to nothing much in the end. It is a sweet little play about nice girls in boarding school, written with charm and pleasant side excursions, rather desultory in its movement and at once tentative and tenuous.

The acting adds much to its charm. Grete Mosheim, making her American debut, acts the part of Erna with genuine emotion. Sonya Stokowski, playing Olga, brings affecting sincerity to the part; Phyllis Avery is lightly amusing as Sally, and Nancy Wiman plays the role of another American girl with straightforward charm. Katherine Alexander acts with gracious authority as the head mistress and the rest, barring a good deal of accent trouble, are very nice, indeed. The play is nice, too, but that doesn't seem to be enough.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *December 24, 1941*

Letters of Hate

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN THEIR "Letters to Lucerne," Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent are showing how the bitterness and hatred of a world at war can be reflected in the lives of a group of school girls. It is their plan to portray the manner in which the everyday communications from their homes can destroy the friendships and the lives of a group of nice young women of different nationalities gathered together in a school on a Swiss mountaintop. With sensitivity, good taste and genuine feeling, the authors describe the wreckage that results to human feeling and human decency through the horrors that the Nazi spirit has brought upon us. "Letters to Lucerne" is a drama of honest emotion, which unhappily suffers from the impression it creates that its narrative is better suited to the novelette than to the stage.

* * *

It is the rather formal pattern of the story which leaves one with that feeling. The girls, it seems, have before coming of the war, hit upon the plan of reading aloud the letters they have received from their families and their sweethearts, much to their mutual enlightenment, mirth and understanding. With the outbreak of the Nazi assault upon Europe, though, the letters take on bitterness and indignation, and it is not long before the English and the French girls are hating the German girl, while the Polish girl is beginning to mistrust her best friend, the young German. There is much poignancy in this picture of the innocents of war sharing and carrying on its callous cruelty, but to present it the authors must provide long scenes in which the young women do nothing but sit about and read each other letters, until the effect, touching as it may be, becomes undramatic and reiterative.

* * *

In the end, in keeping with the pattern, the play goes into a sort of distant version of O'Neill's one-act play, "In the Zone." The girls from France, England and America seize upon a letter addressed to the German girl, expecting to prove that she is an agent of the Nazis, only to find in it the proof of her tragedy. All of this, I repeat, is written with the deepest of sincerity, and much of it is lovely and moving. The letter-reading scheme, however, not only gives the drama an air of monotony but also adds to it a certain artificiality of manner which frequently is disturbing. Admirably played by a charming cast of young women, "Letters to Lucerne" has a freshly engaging quality about it, in addition to its emotional effectiveness, but the final effect is of incompleteness and a vague sense of dissatisfaction.

* * *

As almost every one must have heard, the cast is chiefly composed of daughters of famous men, and their fathers have reason to be proud of them. Miss Sonya Stokowski is gently moving as the tragic Polish girl, Miss Nancy Wiman is pleasantly forthright as a sympathetic American, Miss Phyllis Avery is amusingly satirical as a flighty Dixie belle, Miss Faith Brook is straightforward as the English girl and Miss Mary Bartheimess is not only radiantly pretty but dramatically skillful as the girl from France. Of those with less famous birthrights, Miss Grete Mosheim is extremely fine as the misunderstood German, while Miss Katherine Alexander brings her ingratiating honesty to the role of the understanding head of the school. It does seem a great pity that "Letters to Lucerne" is not quite as effective as you always feel that it should be and is on the verge of being.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 24, 1941

These Letters Are Dull Reading

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"LETTERS TO LUCERNE" is a play about young girls of many nationalities—French, English, German, Austrian and Polish—who are students in a small Swiss school when the war breaks out. From that single sentence you can, without much difficulty, visualize most of what follows. The friendly atmosphere of the schoolroom, the cozy atmosphere of the dormitory, become plagued with bitterness and hostility. Personal lives are painfully disrupted by circumstances.

The young Polish girl is engaged to the German girl's brother; her parents in Warsaw are killed by the Nazis. The sensitive German girl, torn by conflicting emotions, becomes half an outcast. Trying to preserve the old civilized values, the American schoolmistress pleads for tolerance, for a recognition of people as human beings.

The authors have worked to keep their story on a quietly human plane. They have been content, for the most part, to deal with the effect of the war on youthful lives and emotions. They have refused to be melodramatic. And in a very superficial sense they have made *Letters to Lucerne* likeable and touching enough. They have been greatly helped in this, I think, by the inherent appeal and poignancy of youth in distress, and by the very sensitive acting of Grete Mosheim in the central role of the young German girl.

But *Letters to Lucerne* is actually a play with little life to it and less significance. The dialogue lacks freshness and vibrancy. There is far too much talk and not nearly enough movement. The quiet tone steers clear of sensationalism, but only at the cost of dullness. There is a faraway quality about much that goes on that does not belong to such material.

But to pass beyond its playing qualities, *Letters to Lucerne* fails because it grazes more problems than it grapples with, and because it makes use of a situation that looks more rewarding than it is. It is so patently a "situation" that almost any popular approach to it is bound to be somewhat contrived. How, really, WOULD such young girls feel and react and behave? It isn't easy to know, but in a play such as this one you must obviously simplify for dramatic purposes, using the most recognizable emotions, and dividing people into as many types as nationalities.

As for the ethical dilemmas created by war, and more particularly by this war, *Letters to Lucerne* can only indicate them. It lacks the skill to give them dramatic impact.

The cast, for the most part, is good. Miss Mosheim easily takes first honors, but Katherine Alexander and Beatrice DeNeegaard are effective as the schoolmistresses. A bevy of young ladies with well known fathers named Stokowski, Bartheimess, Wiman and Brook help brighten the occasion, the best of them, Sonya Stokowski, providing an excellent performance.

"Letters to Lucerne"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *December 24, 1941*

'Letters to Lucerne' Staged at the Cort

Cast Includes Mrs. Howard Gould, Also Daughters of Five Well Known Men

By JOHN ANDERSON

PEOPLE seeing the ermine being unloaded at the Cort last night probably mistook it for signs of a white Christmas, but it was only the First Night audience trailing in to see "Letters to Lucerne" which has a cast containing five daughters (one each) of five well known men, and which marked also the local debut of Grete Mosheim who in private life is Mrs. Howard Gould.

Under the azure auspices of Mr. Wiman it was undeniably one of the plushiest premieres of the season, though it did not, I'm afraid, give us much of a play.

For Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent look at the beginning of Hitler's war from the safely isolated vantage point of a fashionable girls' school in Switzerland. Six young ladies are back at the end of Summer vacation, 1939. One is English, one German, one French, one Polish, and two American. Olga, who lives in Warsaw, is in love with Erna's brother Hans. As she starts to write her happiness down in her diary that night she asks Erna the date. It is, says Erna, August 31.

Now this is, let us admit, a poignant situation, full of heartbreak if not tragedy. But somehow the authors leave it pretty dry-eyed, and fail to transmit to the audience the wrenching grief of the girls as they see, from the letters they get from home, their lives and the world going to pieces.

In spite of the upheaval the war makes they seem to be in an emotional vacuum, and this vacuum is caused largely, I suspect, by the emptiness of the play itself.

Reversed Telescope

It is a wisp of a play, without much substance or dimension. There seems to be nothing to it. At best it might make a satisfactory one-actor, but even so it would probably be hampered by its preciosity and the pallid futility of wringing wrists on the brink of hell, and then watching the gestures through the wrong end of a telescope.

Somehow I found it difficult to respond suitably to the anguish of poor Olga when German bombers killed her whole family, or Erna's passionate shame of her own people for while these were pretty emotions, of great credit to them both, they seemed fairly irrelevant against the momentous fact of Warsaw in flames. To worry about personal reactions in that situation seems as pointless as writing a play about a case of hiccups in an earthquake.

I imagine the authors realized this fatal detachment of their story, for they took time out in the last act to have the headmistress give a little talk, on treating human beings as human beings—not blanketing them as enemies.

The play proved her point by disclosing that Erna's brother had killed himself rather than bomb Warsaw, and this fact made Olga and Erna fall again into each other's arms.

Handsome Setting

This is a noble argument, but the authors do not make it very convincing. In reducing a world war to a storm in a polite Alpine teacup they seem to have lost perspective. Their miniature is out of scale. As drama it seems not only uninteresting but distorted, and untrue, and tedious.

Mr. Wiman has given it an admirable production, with Mr. Sovey's handsome setting overlooking magnificent scenery on the backdrop, and the cast does extremely well. If Mr. Baird's direction seems occasionally deliberate and too emphatic it is doubtless to cover the worst stretches of the script. Miss Mosheim gives a touching performance as the German girl and provides, in fact, the only really affecting moments of the play by the sensitiveness and muted torment of her playing.

The quintet of young actresses stepping out from paternal eminence is composed of Sonya Stokowski, whose father is the celebrated Leopold, Mary Barthelmess, daughter of Richard, Nancy Wiman, daughter of the producer, Phyllis Avery, daughter of Stephen Morehouse Avery, and Faith Brook, daughter of Clive Brook.

They all prove worthy of their inheritance, especially Miss Stokowski, who is excellent as the bereaved Olga, and Miss Avery, who gets some bubbling, if bumptious amusement out of a somewhat Cindy Lou character who seems to think the Mason-Dixon line is something for lassoing the boys. We may also celebrate the return of Katherine Alexander from the kodaks, an actress of fine distinction, sorely missed these many seasons.

But for all of them, "Letters to Lucerne" seems an anemic stunt—something like yodelling in a cemetery.

"Brooklyn, U.S.A."

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *December 22, 1941*

Murder Syndicate

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE is something agreeably nostalgic these days about a play in which gangsters, talking out of the side of their mouths, squeal, bump each other off, take people for rides and indulge in other melodramatic activities characteristic of their class. In the case of "Brooklyn, U. S. A.," a certain timeliness is added to the proceedings, since the new work by John Bright and Asa Bordages deals with the recent notorious activities of the killers who came to be known as Murder, Inc., but chiefly the pleasure to be derived from it arises from the sweet memories it arouses of the theater and the movies of the '20s and the early '30s. In this respect it is pungent if reminiscent melodrama.

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To a certain extent this reminiscent quality is unfair to the play, because in it the authors are talking of a past so immediate that their plot has been snatched from what is almost literally yesterday's newspapers. Mr. Bordages is a prominent local reporter and Mr. Bright wrote the films that made James Cagney famous, and between them they have told with great and careful accuracy of the rise and fall of the Brooklyn crime syndicate that made recent big business of racketeering and murder. They have not used imagination; they have merely set down a close approximation of the facts, and the result is a brisk and lively melodrama, which includes among its scenes one of the most interesting stage assassinations of the season.

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If "Brooklyn, U. S. A." contained more imagination and less straight, literal adherence to the newspaper files, it would perhaps have proved a more completely satisfying drama. As it is, the story is sometimes confused in its details for those of us who did not read the story of the recent Murder, Inc., trials with meticulous care. It is likewise almost exclusively concerned with the grisly externals of its historic narrative, with the result that its characters are inclined to be two-dimensional. As a third complaint, it is not constructed so as to rise to any striking climax but rather tends to fall off in interest after the exciting ice-pick slaying in the barber shop. Nevertheless, if "Brooklyn, U. S. A." is not a melodrama of significance or brilliance, it is almost always primatively absorbing.

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In either New York or Hollywood the acting in gangster roles is almost invariably convincing, and the Bright-Bordages play is no exception. Eddie Nugent, for example, is coldly effective as the savage killer called Smiley Manone, giving what is easily his best portrayal in this vicinity. Other members of the organization are soundly impersonated by Martin Wolfson, Robert H. Harris, Byron McGrath, Harry Lascoe and particularly, Tom Pedi, who is excellent as an amiable killer more interested in the Dodgers than in his assassinations. Roger De Koven has a well played scene as the mysterious head of the band, while Miss Julie Stevens, as Happy's alcoholically inclined sweetheart, and Miss Adelaide Klein, as a motherly lady with an ambition to carry some coals to Hollywood's Newcastle, are of much help. So, in fact, are Victor Christian, Ben Ross, Sidney Lumet and Miss Irene Winston in lesser roles, and the fine realistic sets of Howard Bay. "Brooklyn, U. S. A." is lively melodrama.

'Brooklyn, U. S. A.'

A play in three acts by John Bright and Asa Bordages; staged by Lem Ward; settings by Howard Bay; presented at the Forrest Theater on December 21, 1941, by Bern Bernard and Lionel Stander. The cast:

The Dasher	Tom Pedi
Smiley Manone	Eddie Nugent
Nick Santo	Victor Christian
Josephine	Irene Winston
Si Ornitz	Ben Ross
Lena Rose	Adelaide Klein
Louis Cohen	Martin Wolfson
A Customer	Lou Leif
Willie Berg	Sidney Lumet
Mike Zubriskie	Robert H. Harris
Jean	Julie Stevens
McGill	Byron McGrath
Philadelphia	Henry Lascoe
Tony Mazzini	David Pressman
Albert	Roger De Koven
A Guard	Eli Siegel

"Brooklyn, U.S.A."

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 22, 1941*

"Brooklyn, USA" is Dramatization of a First-page Murder

"Brooklyn, USA," drama by John Bright and Asa Bordages. Produced by Bern Bernard and Lionel Stander at the Forrest Theatre, New York, Dec. 21, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

"BROOKLYN, USA," which started Christmas week off at the Forrest Theatre last night, is a little on the educational side. It at least shows you how organized murder can be conducted with little fuss and practically no uproar.

Nick Santo, a comparatively honest representative of organized labor who is put out of the way before your eyes in this drama, comes jauntily into Louis Cohen's barber shop and asks Louis for a shave.

Louis' hands are trembling, because he knows what is going to happen. But, being beholden to Albert, the head of a murder ring, he must play his part.

So Louis gets a hot towel from the steam cabinet, puts it over Nick's face and runs away. Thereupon Smiley Manone, a tough guy if ever there was one, and three other members of Albert's mob, draw their ice picks and let Nick have them.

A little squirm, a muffled cry, and it is all over. Quickly a wet wash hamper is wheeled in, Nick's body is loaded into it, out the door it goes and the deed is done.

Brooklyn's Protest

It transpires, however, that Brooklyn is a town that can be pushed just so far. Once news begins to spread of this particularly atrocious crime there is a hue, and later a cry, that stirs an ambitious District Attorney to action.

I think the importance of "Brooklyn, USA," as theatre entertainment, depends largely upon your urge for closer acquaintance with those underworld rats who take the law into their own hands and do as they will with it until a Bill O'Dwyer with sufficient courage to stop them comes into the picture.

As Asa Bordages and John Bright tell the story of "Murder, Inc." in "Brooklyn, USA," it is consistently dramatic, apparently well documented and with all the punches left in.

It is brutally profane and repellantly authentic. But it is both profane and repellant in the cause of a realism that probably is justified in this type of expose.

Personally I am content to take my crime stories from the newspaper accounts of them, and to read only so much of these as interests me.

But, while crime for crime's sake is a depressing business, dulled in the retelling, its dramatized exposure should serve some purpose in reawakening the resentment of such unsuspecting citizens as catch up with it only in the theatre.

Producers Bernard and Stander have hired a good cast for "Brooklyn, USA," and given Howard Bay a chance to provide as convincingly complete a setting as has been lately revealed.

Eddie Nugent, Julie Stevens, Martin Wolfson, Byron McGrath, Irene Winston, Adelaide Klein, Sidney Lumet and a half dozen others played their unhappy parts as though they secretly loathed them, but were determined to do their jobs justice.

I admire them for their loyalty and their individual talents and sympathize with them for the circumstances that have put these virtues to this particular use.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 22, 1941*

Brooklyn, U.S.A. Is Stirring Play

By FRANK FARRELL,
World-Telegram Drama Editor

BROOKLYN now seems to have made the grade as Public Goat No. 1 on Broadway as well as in baseball, only the Kings County commerce chambermen won't easily smile away the latest tossing around their borough receives in the legitimate theater. There's no spoofing in Brooklyn, U. S. A., the new melodrama born in the Forrest Theater last night. It tells a one-sided story, a stark, ruthless exposition of homicide, prostitution, larceny, usury, strikebreaking and racketeering that prevailed during the reign of the recently scattered crime syndicate, Murder, Inc.

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Al Capone's Chicago pales in the past before this grim Brooklyn in the script of Asa Bordages and John Bright. And unless residents of the area at the other end of the Manhattan Bridge hustle up some elevating propaganda the gullible world at large is going to forget that for years Brooklyn has been known as the City of Churches. Because Brooklyn, U. S. A., has qualities which might well establish the play for a good run on W. 49th St. and further development in Hollywood.

Author Bordages is a tall, lean, shaggy young Texan who sits a few desks away, when he's not out tracking down crime and human interest for the World-Telegram. Let Mr. Bordages begin to tell you the details of a story he was unable to crowd into the limited columns of this journal and you will find yourself the speechless partner of an all-night conversation. Yet in Brooklyn, U. S. A., his first attempt at dramatization, there is great economy of language and directness of presentation.

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Author Bright probably is responsible for this, since in previous experience he was half of the team that wrote The Public Enemy, Taxi, Blonde Crazy and other screen successes. Both Bright and Bordages know crime and the characters with whom they deal in Brooklyn, U. S. A. That is evident from the opening scene on a Brooklyn waterfront, where two members of the mob, The Dasher (Tom Pedi) and Smiley Manone (Eddie Nugent) have their pistols ready for the arrival of an ardent, honest union organizer, Nick Santo (Victor Christian).

Circumstances prevent their rubbing him out in that opening scene. In the evolution of the plot the audience is introduced to other members of the gang in their candy store and barber shop headquarters. Their habits, their associations, their operations are exposed as matters progress to a shrieking point of suspense with Nick Santo's death from the mob's ice picks as he reclines in the barber chair with a hot towel over his face.

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Brooklyn's citizenry may derive some satisfaction from the fact that Authors Bordages and Bright remotely imply that once Dodger fans are aroused, not even a terrifying organization like Murder, Inc., can stand in the way. But the more obvious point in the ultimate decline and fall of the "combination" is one which projects the idea that you can't kill a union man and get away with it.

When Bordages and Bright are describing their characters they are typewriter Rembrandts. When they are reporting the details of inner-workings of a gang, it's as thrilling as a page one story of a shooting match in Times Square this morning. But in delivering their unnecessary and uncertain messages, they are about as snappy as those old boys in uniform who look as if they had spent the first 70 years delivering messages.

Brooklyn, U. S. A., is good melodrama, capably directed and acted, however. Eddie Nugent, contrary to his usual roles, is a convincing killer. Pretty Julie Stevens, as a drunken prostitute, takes care of her assignment well enough to establish herself for all future castings here and in Hollywood. Adelaide Klein distinguishes herself as mistress of the gang's candy store and hook shops of the past. All characters, except that of Albert, the gang boss, seem genuine. And every line of the play has been enhanced by the excellent direction of Lem Ward and sets of Howard Bay.

"Brooklyn, U.S.A."

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *December 22, 1941*

'Brooklyn, U.S.A.' Opens at Forrest

Lurid, Truthful, Tough-Talking Drama Comes Out of Murder Racket

By JOHN ANDERSON

OUT of the murder racket that gave Brooklyn a private war until District Attorney O'Dwyer broke it up a play has been made, a play by John Bright and Asa Bordages called "Brooklyn, U. S. A.," which was presented at the Forrest theatre last night by Bern Bernard and a Lionel Stander.

It is a harsh, lurid, truthful, tough-talking drama displaying several enthusiastic homicides, including one killing so awful and so brilliantly played that the First Night eyeballs nearly popped out of the assembled sockets.

The play sags somewhat after that and the third act goes rather completely to pieces, so that in spite of a superb production, it doesn't quite make the grade.

The authors have hit upon a method of telling the story which is probably responsible for both its vivid first half and its steady decline. For it is told from the viewpoint of the murderous gangsters, without a detective on stage, and no hero except the disembodied hero of society itself, pressing quietly in for the kill.

This method gives much of the play a lethal fascination. There is a sort of laboratory interest in watching a stageful of rattlesnakes fighting among themselves and killing one another off, solely because an honest official turns on them a sort of Flash Gordon death ray called the law.

They seem confused and stupid, but deadly and when they are in the death house at Sing Sing the play is finished. Since they are all on the way to the fateful kilowatts as the curtain rises on Act III, their viewpoint goes with them, and the play flounders around pointlessly to a lame conclusion.

How much of it is taken from the records and how much is justifiable fiction I cannot say. The authors have drawn the characters clearly and made the underworld distinctions between the real killers and the saps who fall into a racket because they haven't any better sense. As they emerge in the play they seem mostly cheap bums, small time bullies, and road company Fascists who are not worth the time and trouble it takes the human race to call the exterminator.

As characters in a play they have a handicap that is the result of the initial impulse of curiosity. Once you get used to a stageful of lawless men so desperate that they will do anything, what they do is likely to lack the element of surprise, and the normal tension of dramatic suspense. "Brooklyn, U. S. A." consequently has a tendency to fall into flashy episodes, that are momentarily shocking, but that do not create the larger momentum of satisfying drama.

Excellent Acting

While dealing with the boys who shot up Brooklyn the Messrs. Bernard and Stander have lavishly shot the works and given the play a notable production. Howard Bay has designed several admirable settings, and in the first scene, of the first act, under the towering bollards of a Brooklyn pier, he has filled the stage with magnificent imagination and menace and suggested the dark malignant threat of the play itself.

Under Lem Ward's direction the acting is excellent in all the sharp outlines of gritty character, from Eddie Nugent's violent, though smiling assassin, to Tom Pedi's softly complaining thug, who'd rather see the Dodgers than stick a guy in the ribs—which is no reflection on the Dodgers.

Martin Wolfson describes perfectly an old-time prohibition racketeer, caught up reluctantly in the dangers of the murder racket, and Byron McGrath portrays admirably the suave gangster of the slicker type. The others are all good, notably Adelaide Klein, as a "front," Julie Stevens, as a gangster's girl, Sidney Lumet, Robert H. Harris, and Lou Leif.

I liked so much of it so much that I'd like to have liked all of it more.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 22, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Brooklyn, U.S.A."

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF "Brooklyn, U. S. A." is the toughest melodrama to come along for years there is a reason. It is based on fact. It comes out of the savage underworld of urban rackets. Asa Bordages, who is one of the co-authors, has had a good education in the loathsome affairs of "Murder, Inc.," as a reporter for The World-Telegram. John Bright, his partner in melodrama, was once a reporter for a Chicago newspaper and more recently has been writing scripts in Hollywood.

This column is not sufficiently acquainted with the details of gangsterism to know how faithfully "Brooklyn, U. S. A.," follows the record. But the murder of Nick Santo in the play echoes the murder of Peter Panto, the insurgent longshoreman, whose body was dug out of a lime pit in New Jersey last February. And any further resemblances between the play and police records are doubtless not exactly accidental.

* * *

For "Brooklyn, U. S. A." has the ring of truth. The gangsters are not garish heroes of melodrama but criminals who arouse your contempt rather than your admiration. The murder of the longshoreman at the end of the first act is almost too horrible to be watched in the theatre. When the authors introduce a gangster's moll and set her to talking the argot of parlors of sin, they swagger a little down an old alley of theatre hokum. No play needs to be quite that obscene. But most of "Brooklyn, U. S. A." depicts rackets without cynicism as vicious organizations of cowardice, treachery and crime. Mr. Bright and Mr. Bordages are not playing cops and robbers. They are lifting the lid off a public scandal.

* * *

Their gunmen and thugs are members of Albert's gang. They have their fingers in everything—waterfront unions, usury, houses of prostitution, laundries, teaming, numbers, murder. They represent a tyranny that collects nickels, dimes and dollars from big business and corner cigar stores. They operate with violence and against the law, and in the play you catch glimpses of them against the piers, in a slovenly barber shop or in a bedraggled candy store where they meet. In a general way, "Brooklyn, U. S. A." is the story of how one murder leads to another until the sheer bulk of crime is too monstrous to be concealed. All but the head man get caught by the law and wind up in the death cells.

* * *

As the scene designer Howard Bay has brilliantly caught the ugliness of the corners where crime is hiding away from the decent community. And Lem Ward, who staged "One Third of a Nation," has directed a taut and scorifying performance. Eddie Nugent, who has acted comedy roles for the most part, turns up as the most inhuman of the gangsters and gives an excellent performance. As a minor member of the gang, Martin Wolfson offers an honestly felt portrait of remorse and alarm. Adelaide Klein acts the part of a small storekeeper with remarkable humanity, and Irene Winston is attractive in a clear-cut sketch of a girl in the neighborhood. Ben Ross, Byron McGrath, Robert H. Harris and young Sidney Lumet play other parts with skill.

"Brooklyn, U. S. A." is not a lovely picture. It does not feel swashbuckling about organized crime. It lays the harrowing facts on the line as impersonally as possible. You will not forget what Mr. Bright and Mr. Bordages are reporting.

"Brooklyn, U.S.A."

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 22, 1941*

'Brooklyn, U.S.A.' Opens at the Forrest

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE authors of last evening's "Brooklyn, U. S. A.," have the dispassionate interest of scientists in the lower forms of human life and the descriptive skill of objective reporters. So their picture of a little gang of racketeers, not unlike those who recently did in fact infest the borough across the river, has all the rather horrid colors of real life. It has also the grisly fascination which utterly callous crime has for the relatively law-abiding.

If you want to know how murderers for profit go business-like about their slaughter, John Bright and Asa Bordages are the boys to tell you. Their characters are all murderers, except for here and there a drab and now and then a victim. There is Smiley Manone, who would rather break your arm than not and would sooner kill you than look at you. There is Philadelphia, with his grimly funny story about the pursuit in Miami of a victim who got away because he was a little nearsighted. There is the Dasher, who finds that murders interrupt his devoted worship of the Dodgers. There is Louis Cohen, who was unhappy amid murderers and always protested when there was a man to be stabbed in his barber chair and who finally was rubbed out for his squeamishness.

Such ugly specimens as these and one or two of their women, together with an honest labor leader and the girl who loved him before the gang caught him, are caught in violent action by Mr. Bright and Mr. Bordages. Horrified, but fascinated, we can watch them stabbing with ice picks and shooting with automatics, now kicking a protesting little man to keep him in line and now torturing a girl just for the fun of it. At intervals, "Brooklyn, U. S. A.," will raise your hair, and not by subtle literary tricks. If this isn't a replica of the real thing, it is close enough to it to convince me—and to scare me enough for now.

It is not for those easily upset. The language is almost as hard as the action and the authors have weakened none of it by sentiment. The gangsters are caged in the death house, finally, and the audience greets their incarceration with sincere applause. But no tears are shed, and even the last scene, in which two women mourn their dead, is bracingly sardonic. The play is realistic, in the old sense of the word, and no one could argue it isn't sordid. It is also continuously interesting and exciting, and throws a cold, clinical light into one of the dark places of American life.

After some hesitancy at the beginning, it moves with sharp, accelerating pace and is generally well acted. Eddie Nugent does a fine job as the lowest of the crew; Martin Wolfson gives an excellent performance, as does Adelaide Klein and Julie Stevens plays effectively as a girl who has a masochistic fondness for gangsters, but loves flowers, too, and in the end looks forward to a brighter, but rather equivocal, future. All the rest contribute to the grim doings, which the hardy may enjoy at the Forrest Theater.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 22, 1941*

"Brooklyn, U.S.A." Reports on Murder, Inc. at the Forrest

By WILELLA WALDORF

IN CASE anybody missed the gory details of District Attorney O'Dwyer's round-up of "Brooklyn business men" featured in the press under the fetching headline: "Murder, Inc.," John Bright and Asa Bordages have reported the case in detail in a Living Newspaper issued last night at the Forrest Theatre under the title, "Brooklyn, U.S.A."

Since the material for this theatrical brochure on the Brooklyn gangster and how he operates comes straight from reporters who covered "Murder, Inc." in all its lurid phases, "Brooklyn, U.S.A." is undoubtedly as realistic as Howard Bay's settings, which are very life-like indeed. It is therefore very educational for those of us to whom all gangsters have a way of looking and sounding alike, and it also points a strong moral in that four of the leading killers in the syndicate are shown in the death house spitting at one another along toward the end, while most of the other members of the firm had previously been liquidated by their own associates.

The authors have been content for the most part merely to let their characters' foul deeds speak for themselves. Very little is left to the imagination. Whether the victims are bumped off in a barber's chair with an ice pick, or shot repeatedly while sipping Coca Cola in a candy store, it is all done very thoroughly. After a while one becomes accustomed to the carnage, even rather hard-boiled about it. When one of the more youthful hangers-on was snuffed out offstage during an intermission, we felt vaguely gypped.

Little Editorializing

Although the sort of racketeering that goes on in "Brooklyn, U.S.A." is hardly confined to Brooklyn, being something in the nature of an all-American development since Prohibition, Mr. Bright and Mr. Bordages make little attempt to editorialize in their Living Newspaper. They are reporters, not columnists or editorial writers, and they probably feel that in dubbing their work "Brooklyn, U.S.A." they have indicated a general idea of how they feel about this particular sort of "big business."

Now and then, however, they do find it impossible to keep the cynical newspaper man's viewpoint from breaking through into their factual account. When Albert, the big super-boss who seldom appears but is all-powerful on the telephone, pays one of his rare visits to the gang's headquarters, he tells one of his Jewish henchmen that efforts are being made to get his father and mother out of the clutches of the Nazis.

"Germany is no place for anybody to be dese days," says Albert, shaking his head over the wickedness of the world.

A Factual Report

Although some of "Brooklyn, U.S.A." is strangely fascinating as its heavily accented personnel carries on the business of making dead ones out of live ones, we found its method and point of view too impersonal to develop a genuinely stirring drama as the evening progressed. It is always an easy matter to stir up sporadic excitement over a stabbing or a shooting on stage, but it is something else again to make a play out of authentic material merely by restating it in a series of scenes acted by characters patterned after real people.

As a running account of what Murder, Inc., was all about—something we never did get straight from an occasional reading of the voluminous newspaper stories—"Brooklyn, U.S.A." gave us a pretty good idea of what District Attorney O'Dwyer was up against when he turned on the heat across the river, but it lacked the dramatic impact that more adroit, less reportorial, playwrights might have given it.

A generally capable cast wrestled manfully with the lingo and Lem Ward directed it all with an eye for realistic effect. In spite of all they can do, however, "Brooklyn, U.S.A." becomes monotonous as time goes on. After the first few shocks have worn off, the business of wholesale killing becomes just as uninteresting as any other sort of industrial routine.

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December 22, 1941

Brooklyn's Claim To Dying Fame

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THEY haven't pulled any punches in transferring Murder, Inc., to the world of art. How closely *Brooklyn, U. S. A.*, follows the facts of the enterprise that Mr. O'Dwyer put an end to, I can't say; but it plainly catches the spirit. Messrs. Bright and Bordages have let go with both barrels, and without any romantic flourishes about killer courage, good men gone wrong, lurking soft spots, or honor among thieves. Except for some sentimentality on the moll side of the ledger the play's as tough as the guys it writes about.

Indeed, its cold, hard portrayal of killers at work is by far the best thing about it. At no time is the script brilliant, but as long as you see the members of the mob eying one another, or jockeying for position, or planning a job, or—above all—doing a job, the play seems exciting and real. Their little chore in a barber shop is, indeed, as coldbloodedly horrible as anything you'll ever see on the stage, or ever want to see.

Unfortunately, when Killers at Work becomes Killers at Bay, though it should be even more exciting, it seems less. As the DA's net begins to tighten, and the boys start double-crossing and killing and squealing on one another, even though it may all be faithful to the facts, it seems like much more conventional and trumped-up melodrama.

But if the second act isn't nearly up to the first, it's the last act—with a very bad deathhouse scene and a slow finale about the guls who are left behind—that drags *Brooklyn, U. S. A.*, into the dust. By then, all the kick has gone out of it and it just isn't theater. In fact, despite its fine start, the play as a whole, at least on my score card, runs a little bit less than the required four-and-a-half innings.

The production is pretty uneven. Mr. Ward has directed individual scenes, like the barber-shop killing, admirably, but his staging as a whole lacks timing and punch. Some of the acting is pretty good, some of it pretty bad; none of it is outstanding.

"Pie in the Sky"

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December 23, 1941

Evers Is Fated to Tinker With Chance

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

A YOUNG man in *Pie in the Sky* named Herbert Evers deserves your sympathy. He last appeared on Broadway in *Popsy*, and so without a break has managed to perform in the two most dreadful efforts of these past several years.

Others may care to go further; but addicted as I am to understatement, I can only say of last night's little comedy that it is a bore, a nuisance, and an embarrassment. The plot—which concerns the efforts of some impoverished bluebloods to marry off their recalcitrant son to an oil heiress—won't help you very much, for it is merely stale. In the past, indeed, it has led to some wholly innocuous entertainment. It is rather the dialogue, and the stage business, and the characterizations, and the incidental goings-on that must be lined up before a firing squad.

Some of the characters—such as NeHie the servant girl and Pepino the South American romancer—would seem declasse in the comic strips. They, and others in their group, stopped at nothing in their efforts to entertain. And don't let me forget the dancing. From time to time folks sprang up in the hoity-toity Donald Oenslager drawing-room and jitterbugged or rhumba'd or had spasms. Then everybody merged back into the plot until it was time for another specialty number.

In the end, by the way, the young man didn't marry the oil heiress. His father did.

A large number of blameless and even well-known actor folks were tied up in the proceedings, most of them in knots. Only Luella Gear seemed to me in any way to rise above the situation; she was more amusing than anyone could have expected. Mr. MacGregor's direction was in harmony with the play.

'PIE IN THE SKY.'

A comedy in three acts by Bernadine Angus; staged by Edgar MacGregor; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Playhouse on December 22, 1941, by Mr. MacGregor and Lyn Logan. The cast:

Monte Trenton, Jr. ..... Oscar Shaw
Vera Trenton ..... Luella Gear
Nellie ..... Marjorie Peterson
Dan Harmon ..... Ben Laughlin
Art Winton ..... Lucian Self
Roger Montgomery Trenton 3d, Herbert Evers
Sylvia Kent ..... Leona Powers
Corinne Bassett ..... Enid Markey
Suzy Bransby ..... Barbara Arnold
Lily deLacy ..... Lyn Logan
Pepino Rodrigo ..... Kirk Alyn
Mr. Sterling ..... Ted Emery
Homer Bassett ..... Herbert Corthell
William Taylor ..... Bram Nossen
Emile LeBeau ..... Rafael Corio

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December 23, 1941

'Pie in the Sky' Has Playhouse Premiere

By JOHN ANDERSON

YOU would not expect too much, I suppose, of a play called "Pie In the Sky." You can tell at once that it could be neither a tragedy by O'Neill, nor a comedy by Null Cahd, that it would never have the patrician imprint of The Playwrights' Company, Gilbert Miller or Max Gordon. You would not expect to see Miss Barymore in it, or Mr. Evans, or Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne, Miss Hayes or Miss Cornell. I do not think you would expect to find the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson in it, since it seems a little conservative for the boys who have clinched their fame with pies, not in the sky, but in the face.

In all these surmises you would be quite right, to put it mildly, for "Pie in the Sky" is the work of Bernadine Angus, presented at the Playhouse by Edgar MacGregor and Lyn Logan, and it is, I think, one of the silliest plays I have ever seen, and certainly one of the dullest.

At this point in a review it is customary to suggest gently what the play is about, to outline its plot briefly and painlessly so that you may decide for yourself whether or not you would like to see it. I hesitate to do this with "Pie In the Sky" for fear that some one may whistle for the daffy wagon, or accuse me of making the whole thing up. God forbid.

Story of a Rich Family

For Mrs. Angus tells, with more determination than discretion, the story of a once wealthy Fifth ave. family of the bluest blood, anxious to repair its fallen fortunes by marrying off its young son to a thrice divorced millionairess. The boy doesn't like the scheme because he's in love with another girl, and his girl takes a job in his parents' house as parlor maid, presumably to be near the plot.

There was another housemaid, who was supposed to be funny, and a comic character with arthritis, which seemed a break for a man exposed so seriously to dialogue poison, or what we call word infection. The boy, trying to make good, jilted the rich girl and became vice-president of a perfume company, which made perfume of a somewhat erotic nature. Well, anyway, father trying desperately to save the nuptials and keep the millionairess in the family, sprayed himself with the perfume and decided to divorce his wife and marry Miss Moneybags himself.

Well Known Cast

So help me, that is the story, and if it sounds sensible or entertaining it is due to my own fascinating narrative, since it seems embarrassingly idiotic on the stage of the Playhouse.

Such well known players as Luella Gear, Oscar Shaw, Enid Markey, Leona Powers and Herbert Corthell are in the cast, which is doubtless punishment enough, so I shall leave them in humane silence, hoping that the next time they find such a loose-leaf piece of playwriting they will do as much for me.

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December 23, 1941

'Pie in the Sky,' Comedy of No Importance, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

TO THE troubles which already beset a reeling world a play called "Pie in the Sky" was added last evening. "Pie in the Sky," which came foolishly into the Playhouse, is, however, only a little trouble and hardly worth mentioning. It, too, will pass, taking along as silly a collection of jokes and monkeyshines as ever an author contrived or baffled actors participated in. In such times as these we must look on the bright side of things.

"Pie in the Sky" was perpetrated by Mrs. Bernadine Angus. Mrs. Angus has found an impoverished family of blue blood living in a pretty elegant set by Donald Oenslager. They are trying to marry off their son, who is obviously none too bright, to a girl of fabulous fortune. Her fortune sprang up in a gush of oil when her rude Oklahoma papa was making a small, homely excavation in the farmhouse yard. She became notorious thereafter, until she found little boy blue blood. But he was in love with another pretty chit who surprised everybody—except maybe the members of the audience—by masquerading as a maid in the family mansion. Other characters are curiously involved and there is a lot about an aphrodisiac perfume. You can, I'm afraid, imagine what that is like.

Mrs. Angus has tried very hard to be funny through three acts and achieved, at the top of her flight, only embarrassment for all concerned. Edgar MacGregor, acting as director, has tried to liven things up with some of the most disenchanting horseplay I can remember having seen. Mr. MacGregor and Lyn Logan, acting as producers, have got together as oddly selected a cast as has in my memory infested a New York theatre.

Put Miss Luella Gear at the top of the players' list, and admit that she is, when permitted to pantomime, now and then amusing. She is funniest when she adopts that expression of wry distaste which she can so well assume and which is, in her present predicament, so remarkably appropriate. She is assisted by such able performers as Enid Markey and Leona Powers, and Oscar Shaw does, no doubt, all that anybody could do. I shall give the other members of the cast a little Christmas present by not mentioning their names.

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December 23, 1941

McKinley Throw-Back

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AMERICANS are generous people. They will never believe that a play can be as bad as "Pie in the Sky," which was spattered around the Playhouse last evening. Although this courier was among those assisting at the bon ton première, he is now inclined to pretend that it never happened. What seemed to be happening was that the Fifth Avenue Trentons, destitute, of course, were trying to marry their moron son to a blowzy heiress, who was foolish enough to want him.

It would have been O. K. with the audience if they had married on the spot and gone a long, long way from here. Oscar Shaw and Luella Gear would have been better off; Leona Powers and Enid Markey could have stood it. In fact, it would have been just as well for Lyn Logan, who was doubling in brass as co-producer and actress. Say it didn't happen, pal. At any rate, promise that it will never happen again.